THE BEACH BOYS BRIAN WILSON: THE LOST YEARS

MOJO
The Music Magazine

25 YEARS OF...

blur

"WE WERE ALL HURT" CONFESSIONS OF A TORTURED POP GROUP

THE LEGEND OF SANDY DENNY

"THE SPECIALS BETRAYED ME!" JERRY DAMMERS STRIKES BACK

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TOWNES VAN ZANDT
GIORGIO MORODER
DAEVID ALLEN
GAZ COOMBES
FRANZ FERDINAND WITH SPARKS

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MAY 2015

Issue 258

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"Sandy had everything. I haven't seen her like since she died."

DAVE SWARBRICK SINGS SANDY DENNY'S PRAISES. PAGE 50

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MOJO

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88 NEW ALBUMS Young Fathers shake things up, Blur turn elegiac, Bassekou Kouyaté & Ngoni Ba roll with it, The Prodigy go Quo.

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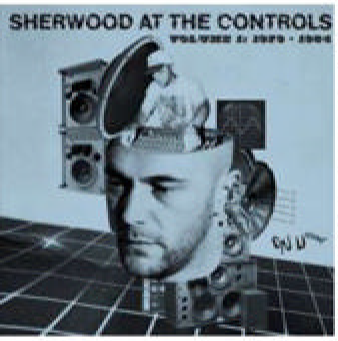
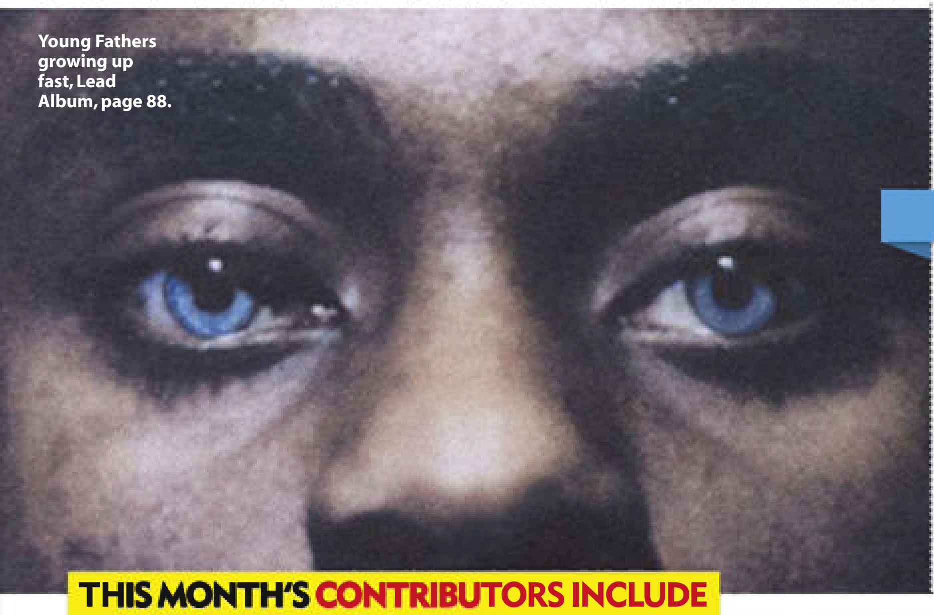


Graveyard shift: Gaz Coombes is On The Road, page 28.



Young Fathers growing up fast, Lead Album, page 88.

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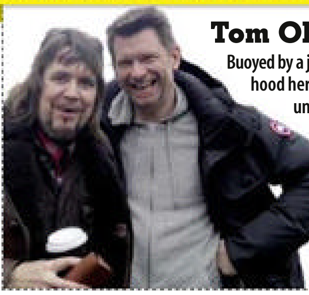
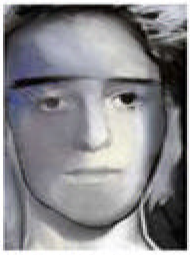


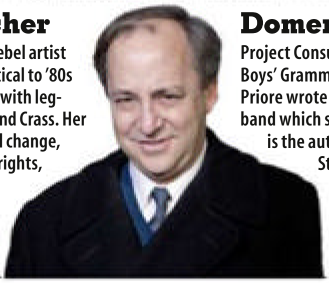
Tom Oldham

Buoyed by a joyful experience with childhood hero Jerry Dammers, Tom was undeterred by his introductory chat with Damon Albarn for this month's Blur feature (page 74): "Best of luck mate – many photographers have tried, and many have failed," he warned. Well, Tom delivered.



Gee Vaucher

Gee is a renowned rebel artist whose work was critical to '80s protest art, notably with legendary anarchist band Crass. Her art is a tool for social change, demanding human rights, dignity and fairness. See the Lead Album (page 88) and www.exitstencil.com

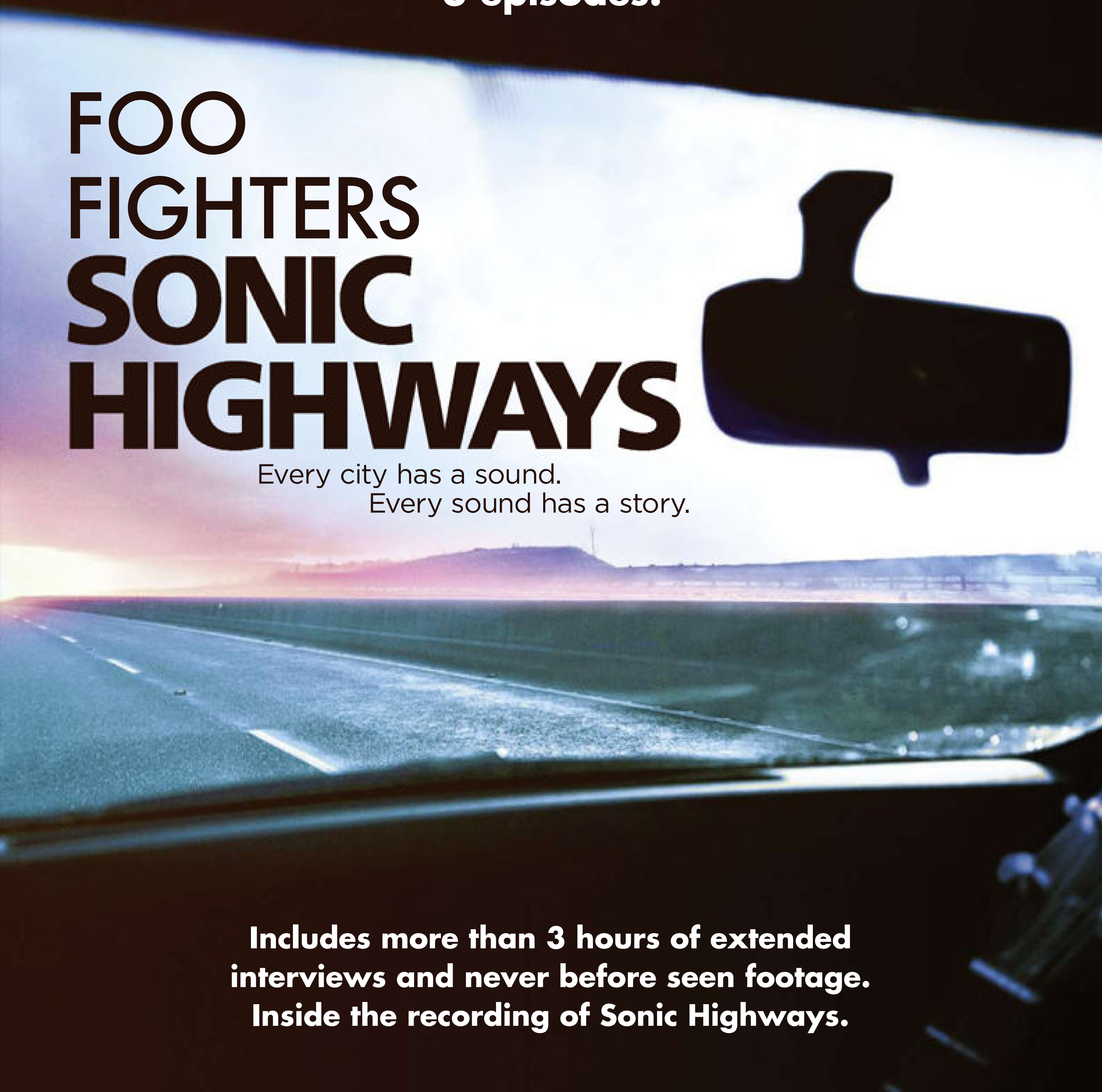


Domenic Priore

Project Consultant for The Beach Boys' Grammy-winning *Smile*, Priore wrote our feature on the band which starts on page 62. He is the author of Riot On Sunset Strip: Rock'n'Roll's Last Stand In Hollywood, a revised edition of which is due out in September.

Gee Vaucher, Mick Hutson, Andy Cotterill

8 songs.
8 studios.
8 cities.
8 episodes.



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modern life is rubbish

MOJO PRESENTS 15 TRACKS OF EVERYDAY BRITISH ANGST

BY THE POP GROUP, SLEAFORD MODS, YOUNG FATHERS, HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT, KATE TEMPEST, GHOSTPOET, FAT WHITE FAMILY, CARL BARÂT AND THE JACKALS, KODE9 & THE SPACEAPE, KATE TEMPEST & MORE

1 carl barât and the jackals

glory days

The opening cut of Carl Barât And The Jackals' recently released debut LP, *Let It Reign*, sees The Libertines man channelling Joe Strummer on a tune full of Clash-inspired guitars and heartfelt vocals. The track's video is in memory of the 306 Commonwealth soldiers shot for desertion during World War II, the classicism of the images and modernity of the lyrics speak to our conflicted times.

Available on: *Let It Reign* (COOKING VINYL)

2 the amazing snakeheads

where is my knife?

Glasgow three-piece The Amazing Snakeheads were one of the first names on our wish-list of artists for this CD, such is their uncompromising approach to music and, indeed, life. The terrifying Where Is My Knife? is proof of that. Sadly, the band's combustible spirit has led to their recent split, their legacy enshrined in the devil-may-care charm of their sole album, *Amphetamine Ballads*.

Available on: *Amphetamine Ballads*

3 fat white family

cream of the young

Along with Sleaford Mods, Fat White Family have established themselves as a band unafraid to challenge modern morality head-on. The chaos of their early live shows is legendary, but there is also a sophistication to their music that is often unheralded. Cream Of The Young exemplifies the point, while its unflinching lyricism deals with the kind of subject matter that reflects the recent outpouring of stories to emerged from the moral quagmire of the predatory '70s.

Available on: *Champagne Holocaust*

4 nadine shah

stealing cars

Despite being lazily compared to PJ Harvey, Whitburn's Nadine Shah is an artist fearless in her criticism and depiction of the world she sees around her. Her debut album, *Love Your Dum And Mad*, tackled loss, suicide and the sheer burden of modern life. Stealing Cars, the first single from her new album *Fast Food* (co-produced by Ben Hillier), sees her employ her rich, sensual vocal tone to critique the culture of greed that surrounds us.

Available on: *CD*

9 young fathers

rain or shine

Scottish art-rap trio Young Fathers follow their Mercury Music Prize scooping debut *Dead* with a set that pushes their sound on into territory that is textured, bold, confrontational and downright mesmerising. Rain Or Shine, the first single from that second LP, *White Men Are Black Men Too* (see review, p88), juxtaposes a direct beat against a mellifluous set of melodies that work their way into your brain and create a twisted pop groove.

Available on: *White Men Are Black Men Too* (BIG DADA)

10 the pop group

citizen zombie

Mark Stewart's re-energised Bristol post-punk outfit reaffirm their position as uncompromising agit-pop provocateurs with *Citizen Zombie*, their first studio album since 1980. Helmed by producer Paul Epworth, the album's title track hisses with dissent and unconcealed rage at today's herd-like mentality. Broken sounds mask melodic power, on a track that's an unlikely earworm that leaves you with one chilling thought: "Maybe your mind has been wiped clean?"

Available on: *Citizen Zombie* (FREAK 9)

11 sleaford mods

under the plastic and n.c.t.

"Ryvita! Ryvita! Cracked black pepper!" snarls Jason Williamson of Nottingham-based post-punk/hip hop duo Sleaford Mods, his crisp-bread bashing kicking off a tune that picks at the sores of modern life. Digital addiction, "Saturday lager bellies" and the state are all singled out for a good lyrical kicking, on a track where the quotidian manages to crush noble intentions or, as Williamson puts it, "Under the general weight of it all/Exist impossible visions of love."

Available on: *Divide And Exit*

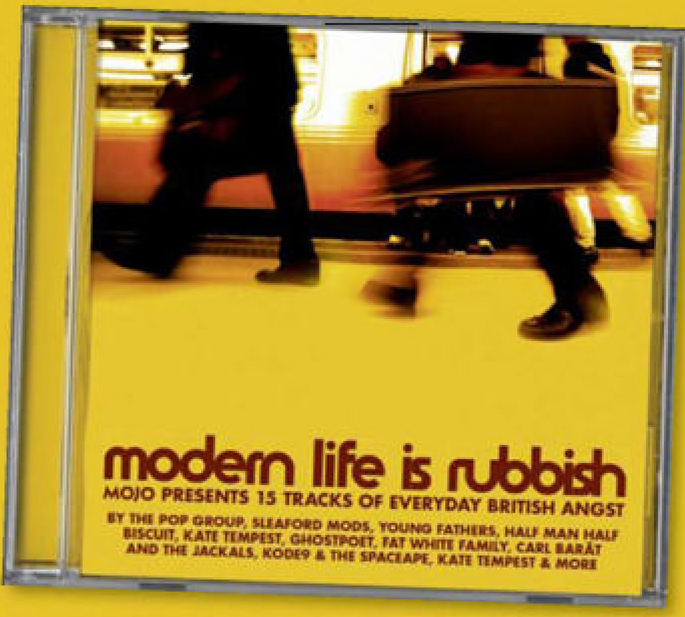
12 the bohicas

to die for

Essex-via-East London four-piece The Bohicas create music designed to make you feel good via a surfeit of energy and their post-Britpop smarts. Recent single To Die For – which precedes their debut album - is a fine example of that, its rampant classicism harking back to The Beatles and, indeed, Domino Records labelmates Artic Monkeys. "If I can eat my words/I will lick my plate," they offer with a grin on this, a lustful modern day indie anthem.

Available on: *iTunes*

Getty Images


modern life is rubbish
MOJO PRESENTS 15 TRACKS OF EVERYDAY BRITISH ANGST
BY THE POP GROUP, SLEAFORD MODS, YOUNG FATHERS, HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT, KATE TEMPEST, GHOSTPOET, FAT WHITE FAMILY, CARL BARÂT AND THE JACKALS, KODE9 & THE SPACEAPE, KATE TEMPEST & MORE

NAMED AFTER BLUR'S CAREER-DEFINING SECOND album, *Modern Life Is Rubbish* is a collection of very British angst that reflects the uncertain times we live in. The range of music on offer is varied and full of different moods and textures. What links all 15 of the acts hand-picked by MOJO to appear on this compilation is their ability to make you feel good about the bad things in life. Conflict, love, lust, greed, time-wasting, disaffection, fear and downright resistance are all topics up for discussion across a series of tracks by artists who have something to say about the world we live in and most of whom are blessed with a keen powers of observation and the musical smarts to match. Listen in closely, and you may find yourself in these songs…

5 kate tempest

marshall law

"Everywhere is monsters/Tits out, wet-mouthed, heads back/Shouting and screaming just to prove they exist," raps south London poet Kate Tempest on the opening three lines of this tune – the prologue to her latest album, *Everybody Down*. It sounds like a reflection on binge culture, the entire album narrating a story involving three key characters, all of whom seem trapped in a world full of boredom and dissatisfaction, impassive protagonist Becky included.

Available on: *Everybody Down* (BIG DADA)

6 ghostpoet

off peak dreams

The never-ending everyday penury of rising transport costs informs the title of Ghostpoet's latest single. It comes with a video – shot for a mere £2,068 by director Liam St Pierre – that documents the drudgery endured by a mid-'20s office worker. Musically, the slow-moving groove underlines Ghostpoet's finely observed lyrical approach. Asked what inspired the track, he comments: "There's just a general feeling in the air at the moment: things are shit."

Available on: (CD, DL, LP)

7 kode9 & the spaceape

devil is a liar

Steve Goodman has been making and nurturing some of the most absorbing music of the last decade, both as his alter-ego, Kode9, and via his label, Hyperdub. This slice of bass-heavy minimalism is overlain by Spaceape's apocalyptic subject matter. Tragically, this track – from the Killing Season EP – is also Spaceape's swan song, the much-loved MC having lost his battle with cancer before its October release.

Available on: *The Killing Season EP*

8 lonelady

bunkerpop

How many times have you wanted to withdraw from the world? Simply pull down the shutters and block it all out? That isolationist tendency informs Manchester electro-moodist LoneLady's second LP, *Hinterland*, recently released on Warp. "Concrete interior as a state of mind" is how she describes the lyrical sentiment on a track where a she creates an irresistible '80s-inspired, synth-beat groove built around interlocking guitars and an uplifting, luscious vocal.

Available on: *Hinterland* (WARP)

13 crushed beaks

rising sign

Damon Albarn is not a man in thrall to the idea of legacy but listen to Crushed Beaks' frontman Matthew Poile's wonderfully snotty vocal delivery on this tune and it's hard not to be transported back to the days when Blur transformed Camden's Good Mixer into Britpop's epicentre. "The more I think about it/The less I care!" sings Poile, as buzzsaw guitars propel this track through two minutes and 23 seconds of indie-rock immediacy.

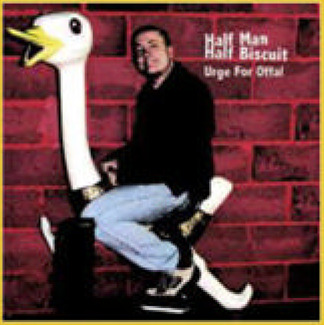
Available on: *CD/DL/LP*

14 menace beach

tastes like medicine

Despite its title, *Ratworld* – the recently released debut album by Leeds-based Menace Beach – rejects all-out nihilism in favour of indie-rock exuberance. Indeed, the fizzy, fuzzy Tastes Like Medicine sees the principal MB duo of Ryan Needham and Liza Violet drawing on influences ranging from Slowdive to Pavement, recalling a time when disaffection, a floppy fringe and a keen ear for melody could propel an act to the upper echelons of the indie chart.

Available on: *Ratworld* (MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)



15 half man half biscuit

westward ho! massive let down

"Mixed response to Half Man, Half Biscuit's song about Westward Ho!" read a headline in the North Devon Journal in late 2014 following the Merseyside outfit's hymn to a holiday in the seaside village. Sadly, the protagonist's proposed holiday with "the girl of his dreams" ends when he wakes up. Cue: the "massive letdown". It's a fitting end to a collection that, alongside bigger issues, also pulls at the belly-fluff of modern life.

Available on: *Urge For Offal* (PROBE PLUS)

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14 Songs from the Unknown

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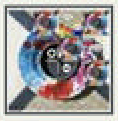

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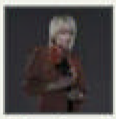


RÓISÍN MURPHY
Hairless Toys
11th May

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

Viggo Mortensen

ACTOR, MUSICIAN, KING OF GONDOR

What music are you currently grooving to?

Right now it's **Vladimir Ashkenazy**'s version of Scriabin's Piano Sonata No.8, Op.66, and **Al Green**'s Funny How Time Slips Away, from the *Call Me* album.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I'm not willing to pick just one, no matter how pushed or shoved!

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I remember buying two at the same time, when my family moved from Argentina to the USA, to northern New York, in 1970: **Grand Funk Railroad**'s *Closer To Home* and **David Bowie**'s *The Man Who Sold The World*.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Not to be them, but I'd like to play like **Vladimir Horowitz**, **Martha Argerich** and **Bill Evans** – all pianists – and **Paco de Lucía**, **Chet Baker**, or **Billy Zoom** (guitarist of Los Angeles punks **X**).

What do you sing in the shower?

All kinds of things, but I do that in the bath, which I prefer to showers. This morning I was singing Forgetful, which was written by Jack Segal and George Handy, and sung by **David Allyn**. It was made famous by Chet Baker on his *Milano Sessions* album.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Every Saturday night's different. Last Saturday I listened to various records, including It's Natural To Be Afraid, by **Explosions In The Sky**, from the *All Of A Sudden I Miss Everyone* album.

And your Sunday morning record?

Last Sunday morning my head was pounding, so I enjoyed the relative silence of home before everyone else woke up. I eventually put on the radio, but I don't remember what I heard that morning… it was a classical station. Might have been a piece by **Sibelius**. I got a slow start mentally that day, so my memory's a bit vague.

Jauja is released in select cinemas nationwide by Soda Pictures on April 10

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

IN WHICH THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING…

Lulu

STILL SHOUTING!

What music are you currently grooving to?

There's a list – I really love FourFiveSeconds by **Rihanna**, **Kanye** and **Paul McCartney**, anything that **Ed Sheeran** does, **Rita Ora**… I love a verse/chorus/verse, a middle 8, melodiousness – to use an urban phrase, a tune.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I have lots, but off the top of my head I'll say **Don Henley**'s *The End Of The Innocence* and **Bonnie Raitt**'s *Nick Of Time*. The songs are lovely and both of them are such talents. They're timeless and I can always play them.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

It was **Brenda Lee**'s Sweet Nothin's, my parents bought it for me, actually… I miss the single as an object. I was singing long before that, though.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Eric Clapton. Or **Jimi Hendrix**. They're both influenced by the same roots, the blues, and they're both greats. I tried learning the guitar in my forties but I dropped it when my fingers got sore. Hopeless!

What do you sing in the shower?

Anything I've been listening to on the radio – maybe **Pharrell**'s Happy. I go from Radio 1 to Kiss to Capital, and Radio 4 if I want to hear some comedy. There's a lot about the music industry now that I'm critical of, but not the music. When it's good, it's as good as it ever was.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

What, before I go out on the razz? I don't, but if I did, to a concert, I might play whoever I'm going to see. I have a big thing about **Meghan Trainor**, and **Bruno Mars** is genius talented… they'd get me going. I don't play old music.

And your Sunday morning record?

Sam Smith – he reminds me of **Luther Vandross**. I'll have my bagels, smoked salmon and cream cheese and see my grandchildren.

Lulu's Making Life Rhyme (Decca) is released on March 30

Rex

AL GREEN
CALL ME

THIN LIZZY
The Boys are back in town

NOW PLAYING

- On a day-to-day basis, Viggo Mortensen's digging Al Green's Funny How Time Slips Away cover off 1973's *Call Me*.
- On Saturday night, Black Metal pioneer Cronos jumps around the front room to Thin Lizzy's 1976 hit The Boys Are Back In Town.
- In case of a house fire, one of Lulu's first moves would be to grab Bonnie Raitt's 2003 Grammy buster *Nick Of Time*.

Cronos

THE VOICE OF VENOM

What music are you currently grooving to?

Jethro Tull's *Aqualung* album. I thought I'd finally update my Tull collection from vinyl to CD. I'm six albums in and counting. Amazing. People don't get them as a metal band, but they're totally metal. I've just got into **Behemoth**, dark and sinister but very believable.

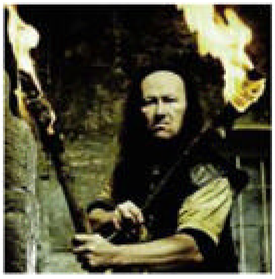
What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

It changes. Any Tull album. I was updating my **Rush** collection, great stuff. I recently came across some **Corrosion Of Conformity** albums I didn't have. On the 70,000 Tons Of Metal [cruise festival], they did the whole of [1991 LP] *Blind*. Fantastic.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Status Quo's *Dog Of Two Head*, and I bought it in 1975/6 with my paper round money from a shop called Sounds in the town where I lived. They played six nights at Newcastle City Hall; I went every night. The way I hold a guitar is totally Quo.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?



I've always been inspired by people, rather than copy them. The first person I thought, "I wish I could play like you", was **Geddy Lee** from **Rush**. I still play along with their records.

What do you sing in the shower?

I'm from the North-east, I jump in the shower, go "Brrrrrrrrrr!", then jump out again (*laughs*). I don't really sing in it.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Thin Lizzy, The Boys Are Back In Town… I grew up with that in my teenage years. For that feel-good shit, **Black Sabbath**. Some say it's depressing, but it affects me in a very positive way. It transports me back to being 15, when I felt invincible.

And your Sunday morning record?

Kate Bush. If you want to kick back, forget everything and be taken to another place, there's nothing like the atmosphere of her music. Faultless. I like **Enya** as well, very interesting.

Venom's From The Very Depths is out now on Spinefarm

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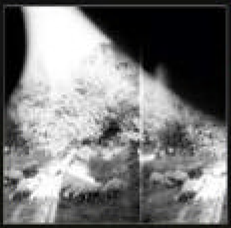

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BLADE OF THE RONIN

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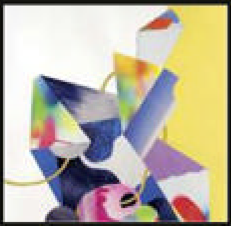

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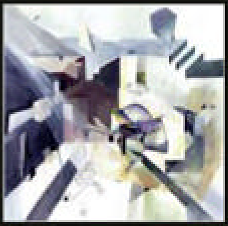

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THEORIES, RANTS, ETC.

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WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, THE greatest musicians manage to create their own world and deliver their vision to us in a manner that inflames our imagination. This month, we are proud to extend our arms across the Atlantic and mark the return of both Brian Wilson and Blur – two very different acts, joined by that ability to make us dream in very different ways. Indeed, MOJO is and has always been about celebrating visionary musicians, and we are proud to do so once again this month in an issue which is dedicated to two men whose loss has been keenly felt. This one goes out to Steve Strange and the indefatigable Daevid Allen – men with the ability to see and hear the world differently…

PHIL ALEXANDER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

That's all right, isn't it

I have just finished playing the *Physical Graffiti Redrawn* CD that came with MOJO 257. If there has ever been a better CD given away with a music mag I have yet to hear it. Some interpretations are faithful, some adventurous and some interestingly bizarre, but together they form a fitting tribute to a truly classic album. I was a mere schoolboy when I went to see my first proper live band – Led Zep at Earl's Court in 1975. The experience will stay with me forever. When you give away a better CD I will let you know. Thanks again.

Laurence T, Coventry

Be lost without you

Many thanks for the magnificent piece on *Physical Graffiti* in MOJO 257. This album has wonderful memories for me. As 14-year-old Bowie nuts, Mick Fidler and I were struggling to understand the *Young Americans* 'Plastic Soul' period, so we turned to *PG* for a blast of the mighty Zeppelin. In our dinner hour we would hot-foot down to our house, cut some chips and while they were frying stick *Graffiti* on, and in particular The Rover, and go nuts to it. Not a celebrated track *à la* Trampled Under Foot/ Kashmir, etc, but what a stomper! I have just bought the 3-CD version and am glad to see the cut-out tenement block-style cover has been restored.

After a battle with cancer, Mick passed away a few years ago. I am listening to the album now and thinking back to our teenage years and remembering my old friend. As a music – and thus MOJO – obsessive, the power of music and the memories evoked never ceases to amaze me, and the magazine has brought to my attention dozens of artists I missed first time around. Keep up the great work.

Craig Feetham, via e-mail

That's a bit strong

Re: your review of Madonna's *Rebel Heart* [MOJO 257]. Are you not ashamed to publish this review? I won't buy your magazine any more.

Didier Niclaes, via e-mail

Anything else you feel you can share?

I wasn't surprised to open your MOJO 257 letters page and find the first three correspondents reacting in a knee-jerk manner to your Madonna article. What did throw me off course, though, was the detrimental mention also of both The Kinks and Bowie by M. Hunt from Wirral. Really? Would you rather another Neil Young, Beatles, Stones or Springsteen cover story? I'm not a huge Madonna fan per se, but her longevity can be admired from afar and she certainly deserves her place on the pop map. I breathe a sigh of relief every time MOJO puts someone a little more esoteric on its cover, be it Kate Bush, Siouxsie Sioux, Debbie Harry, etc.

Don't get me wrong, I'm in my fifties and listen to myriad genres of music, from Sinatra to Sabbath, Satie to Sly Stone, Boards Of Canada to Beethoven, Byrds to Bolan, James Brown to Beach Boys, King Crimson to Kraftwerk. Come on you clowns, how about a bit of musical flexibility instead of acting like the Daily Mail equivalent of a musical reactionary?

And by the way MOJO, the Led Zeppelin cover article was a treat, Jimmy Page generously eloquent as usual, *Physical Graffiti* deserving all the accolades.

Pete Lightfoot, via e-mail

Go down to Forbidden Planet

I feel compelled to reply to the gentleman from Hale who was somewhat critical of Marilyn

➢

≺ Manson [Theories, Rants, Etc, MOJO 257]. Contrary to his assertion, Manson is not an 'idiot' but is hugely accomplished in the fields of songwriting, watercolour painting and distilling. He was given a selection of clearly leading questions [Self-Portrait, MOJO 256] and gave pithy and intelligent responses. Perhaps 'Stephen' from Hale should just acknowledge that the lifestyle differences Manson (auteur) and himself (armchair critic) are too great to be reconciled and that the latter will never understand the myriad gifts of the former.

Mr McNulty, Dewsbury

You've never disappointed me

Just a little note to tell you how much I appreciate your magazine. It's a real pleasure to receive MOJO each month. You're doing a great job, Phil, thanks for being there. A big story on the original Alice Cooper band would be great.

Stephan Blouin, Montréal

I've done time inside

Thanks for the piece on the oft-overlooked life of Ronnie Spector [MOJO 256]. It was nice to see her come to terms with but not exploit the tragedy for a career reinvention the way Tina Turner did with hers.

I also appreciate the commemoration of Joe Cocker, though how could you not mention his rip-roaring, perhaps greatest Beatles cover, She Came In Through The Bathroom Window? An intriguing anecdote about Cocker comes from my mother, who says her late friend Margaret Corey – her father was the comedian 'Professor' Irwin Corey – and Joe all took a rowboat to Alcatraz in 1969, to offer assistance to the Native Americans during their famous occupation of the island that year. Now only Irwin [who turned 100 last year – Letters Ed.] remains to tell the tale. Perhaps MOJO could look him up and shed some light on this episode in the adventures of the late, great Cocker.

Stephen Conn, Las Cruces, New Mexico

Nice one

Great MOJO 256 article on Bob Dylan's greatest cover versions, and even greater to read an interview with Gordon Lightfoot in the same article. I think a piece on Lightfoot is well overdue in your magazine, as he's a fantastic songwriter and singer much overlooked by the music press over here. Elvis, Dylan and Johnny Cash couldn't all be wrong! Neil Young covered two of his songs on his last album also. Would love to see your great magazine give a great artist his due.

Dan O'Malley, Mitcham, Surrey

We're all after the same things in life

I've collected your magazine since Issue 1 – 1.9 linear metres of the best music writing on the planet – and far be it from me to suggest future articles. But how about…? Mahavishnu Orchestra; Marc Bolan (the 'falling off the star' era); Deep Purple Mk IV; Cliff In the '70s (no, really); The Beatles' Greatest Shit: Lend Me Your Comb To Maxwell's Silver Hammer; Miles Davis '74-'75 – Dark Sorcerer… And if you're feeling particularly brave – deep breath – Gary Glitter, The Isley Bothers, The KLF, Deodato, It Bites, Bill Graham's Fillmore East, Ultravox!, War! Meat Loaf, Miles Copeland's Star Truckin '75 tour! Etc! And I don't care what excuse you use – interview Sir George Martin!!!

J. Robinson, via e-mail

I just want to cry

Re: Mark Paytress's Ian McLagan obituary in MOJO 255. It's said that you should never meet your heroes but this never applied if Mac was one of them. I've never met anyone like him and I doubt anyone will ever match his outgoing personality and complete willingness to spend time chatting music with a fan (over a beer even!). He was as big in heart and friendliness as he was diminutive and the world just isn't the same without him.

Bill Luther, Pennington, New Jersey

We'll take that as a yes

Kudos to all who were involved with the David Bowie MOJO 255. Perfect reviews of his 100 greatest songs. I cannot say how much I enjoyed reading this issue. Thank you so much.

Nick Lobodycz, Stratford, Ontario

Like everyone else

Every list in every magazine is subjective in nature, so it's not the rankings of David Bowie's 100 Greatest Songs [MOJO 255] I have a problem with, but more the omissions. No I'm Afraid Of Americans? No Bang Bang? Oh well, I did really enjoy the attached CD, one of your best. For whatever reason, I never realised the Anthony Newley influence, but damn – it's all right there in the digital grooves.

Ed Been, Encinitas, CA

Miscarriages of justice are very common

When oh when is MOJO going to do a feature on the great Welsh band Man? They have just released a new album, *Reanimated Memories*, on the Esoteric label and played a superb set at the Half Moon in Putney last Sunday night.

With their long and convoluted history (best documented in Deke Leonard's books) and their consistently great playing over all the many line-up changes they are one of the most under-rated bands of all time. Please, PLEASE rectify this omission as soon as!

Tim Jones, Havant

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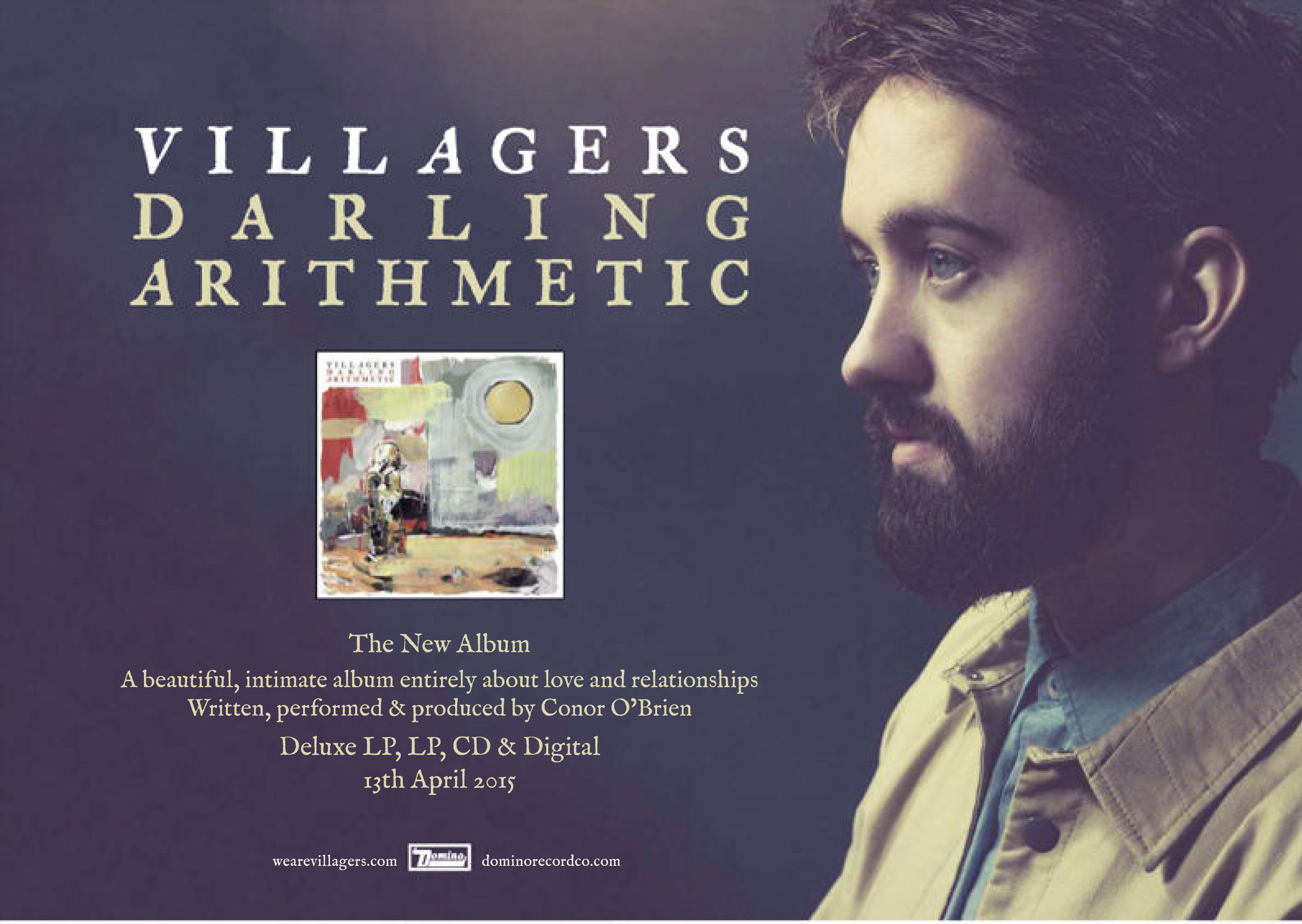

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FRANZMAEL

THIS TOWN *IS* BIG ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US…

Franz Ferdinand and Sparks tell all about their new collaboration F.F.S.!

"You always have this terrible worry when you meet someone whose records you love that they might be an arsehole," explains Franz Ferdinand's Alex Kapranos, laughing. "But Ron and Russell were amazing – they've got a great sense of humour, sharp and self-deprecating. Ron's stage persona is very intimidating but they're both warm, giving people."

Kapranos is talking about the special friendship at the heart of F.F.S, an extraordinary new band formed by the members of the singer's Scottish art-rock aggregate and storied LA electro-glam duo Sparks. The collaboration was first mooted 11 years ago, when the two groups enjoyed a lunch together in Los Angeles after Ron and Russell Mael had read an interview in which Kapranos, touring his band's self-titled debut album, sung Sparks' praises.

"Just from the little we knew about them we thought they'd be interesting to work with," says singer Russell Mael. "We liked their artiness and sense of style. They were doing something special and on their own terms. We said, 'Let's do something!' Then 10 years slipped away…"

The idea was rekindled in April 2013 when Sparks bumped into Kapranos in downtown San Francisco. At the time, he was vainly seeking out Huey Lewis's dentist after breaking a tooth at a show in South America.

"I was completely lost with an aching tooth," explains Kapranos. "Our tour manager knew Huey Lewis's tour manager, who'd given me the address of Huey's dentist. Then I heard Ron's voice saying, 'Is that you, Alex?!'"

A flurry of MP3 files were subsequently pinged back and forth across the Atlantic – the first a Ron Mael-originated song playfully titled Collaborations Don't Work – in a tentative bid to create a hybrid FF-Sparks single. It quickly became apparent, however, there was enough material for a whole album, which was recorded at RAK studios in north London in winter 2014 with producer John Congleton.

Tracks include the aforementioned Collaborations…, on which both parties express their early anxieties about the project, The Power Couple, Police Encounters and first single Johnny Delusional.

"The first time we played the songs together was in London, a week before we went into RAK," says Russell. "When Alex and I began singing together it sounded really good, separately and in unison. F.F.S doesn't sound like Franz Ferdinand or Sparks, but a totally new band."

It was FF's drummer Paul Thomson who seized upon the profane text-speak acronym that the two groups' names created. "He texted me the letters followed by an exclamation mark, and it immediately seemed obvious," says Kapranos.

The album, mixed last month in Dallas, will be released to coincide with a series European of F.F.S dates in June and July. "There are so many factors against a collaboration like this actually happening," concludes Russell. "But it couldn't have worked out better."

Pat Gilbert

> **"IT SOUNDS LIKE A TOTALLY NEW BAND."**
> **Russell Mael**

Playing silly muggers: F.F.S. (clockwise from bottom left) Nick McCarthy, Bob Hardy, Paul Thomson, Alex Kapranos, Russell Mael and (KO'd, centre) Ron Mael in East London; (below) Ron has a change of clothes.

Credit in here

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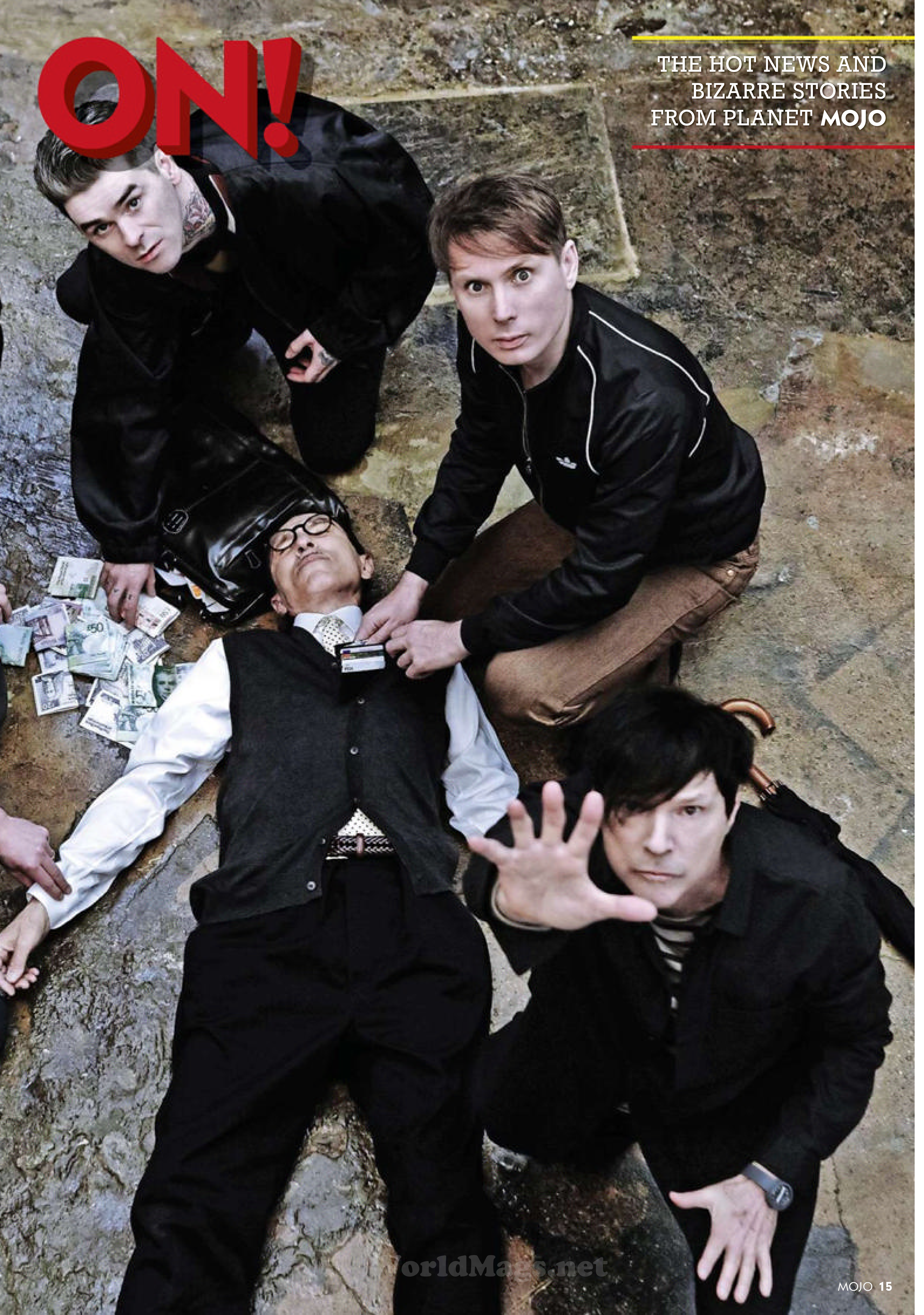


13th Floor Elevators
Easter Everywhere
13th Floor Elevators
13 Floor Elevators
Bull of the Woods

Trip advisors: Roky Erickson and albums; (top right) three-quarters of the band and friends are inducted into the Texas Music Hall of Fame, 2005 (from left) Powell St John, Benny Thurman, John Ike Walton, Roky and Ronnie Leatherman; (below) Tommy Hall (and jug).

LEVITATIONGAMES

13TH FLOOR ELEVATORS REFORM!

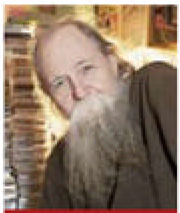
But how? Biographer and confidant Paul Drummond investigates the most unexpected reunion of all.

Given The 13th Floor Elevators' tumultuous history, any kind of reunion seemed singularly unlikely. Yet, following a year of rumour, Friday 13 in February brought the announcement that the classic line-up will reform to mark their 50th anniversary, at a performance on May 10 at the Levitation Festival (formerly Austin Psych Fest) in Austin, Texas.

The line-up features all the surviving members that toured Texas and California during 1966 and 67: lead vocalist and guitarist Roky Erickson, visionary lyricist and electric jug player Tommy Hall, drummer John Ike Walton and bassist Ronnie Leatherman. Eli Southard, guitarist with Roky's current band The Hounds Of Baskerville and long-term Elevators supporter Fred Mitchim will pay homage to late guitarist Stacy Sutherland. 'Special guests' are promised.

Since the Austin Psych Fest began in 2008, co-organiser Rob Fitzpatrick admits their "big dream, so far-fetched you wouldn't dare say it out loud," was to reunite the group. "I contacted Paul [Drummond] early on to see what he thought of the idea," he says. "If anyone would know if it was possible, it was Paul."

They contacted me [Drummond wrote the 2007 band biography Eye Mind] in January 2014, and since I knew everyone, I called them directly. Tommy was the least likely candidate: when I'd first met him in 1999, he dismissed the band as nothing further than a naïve vehicle to express his ideas for the pathway to enlightenment. When I popped the question, he answered "right cool" and without missing a beat launched into the specifics of what he required: "a direct pencil mike, to hold in one hand and a jug in the other. A small two-quart jug, NOT a larger one." I assured him that I had already acquired the perfect jug with John Ike from a Johnson City antique shop, where he'd sourced jugs in the '60s. "Thanks a lot man!" Click!



"I NEED A DIRECT PENCIL MIKE, TO HOLD IN ONE HAND AND A JUG IN THE OTHER..."
Tommy Hall

Ronnie Leatherman replied, "I'm always in," while John Ike was his usual charming self, suspicious and condemning of all. In anticipation of his reaction I figured I might call his bluff by having Zak Starkey lined up as his replacement (he was delighted to be asked and even offered to stand by as second drummer). But there was no way that John Ike wasn't going to hold court at a festival dedicated to the band he founded.

Finally, this January 15, a rehearsal took place in Kerrville, Texas, with Roky, Ronnie and John Ike plus Southard and Mitchim. Said Ronnie: "Roky sounded good, he was pretty communicative… the screams were good, and he wasn't even forcing them like I know he would at a show. Fred sounds good, he knows the signature licks." Even John Ike conceded that it "went well".

Said Tommy: "It'll be fun, we'll be able to put on a pretty good show. I need to speak with Roky again and figure a puzzle for the list of songs and we'll see if he wants to do them in that order."

"It's something that I always felt that we should do," added Ronnie. "One more gig together. Everybody just parted [in 1968] and didn't want to stay in touch. I thought it was never gonna happen, but now it's going to I'm really happy."

But does it feel like the old Elevators again? "Well, I have to play a show to answer that."

There are no plans for a tour: however, there have been offers which the band will consider only after they see how they enjoy this experience. If you're a diehard fan, the Levitation Festival – which has three stages set over a small ranch by the Colorado River – could be your only chance to see this legendary band.

austinpsychfest.com

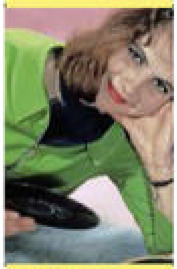
MOJO DIARY

APRIL 3

A new instalment of online music show Television Blues debuts on televisionblues.com. An hour of live music and discussion from the team that brought you the Arthur Lee doc Love Story and The Ballad Of Mott The Hoople, this episode features **Sleaford Mods** (above), **Vic Godard**, **Duke Garwood** and **Anton Newcombe**.

APRIL 14

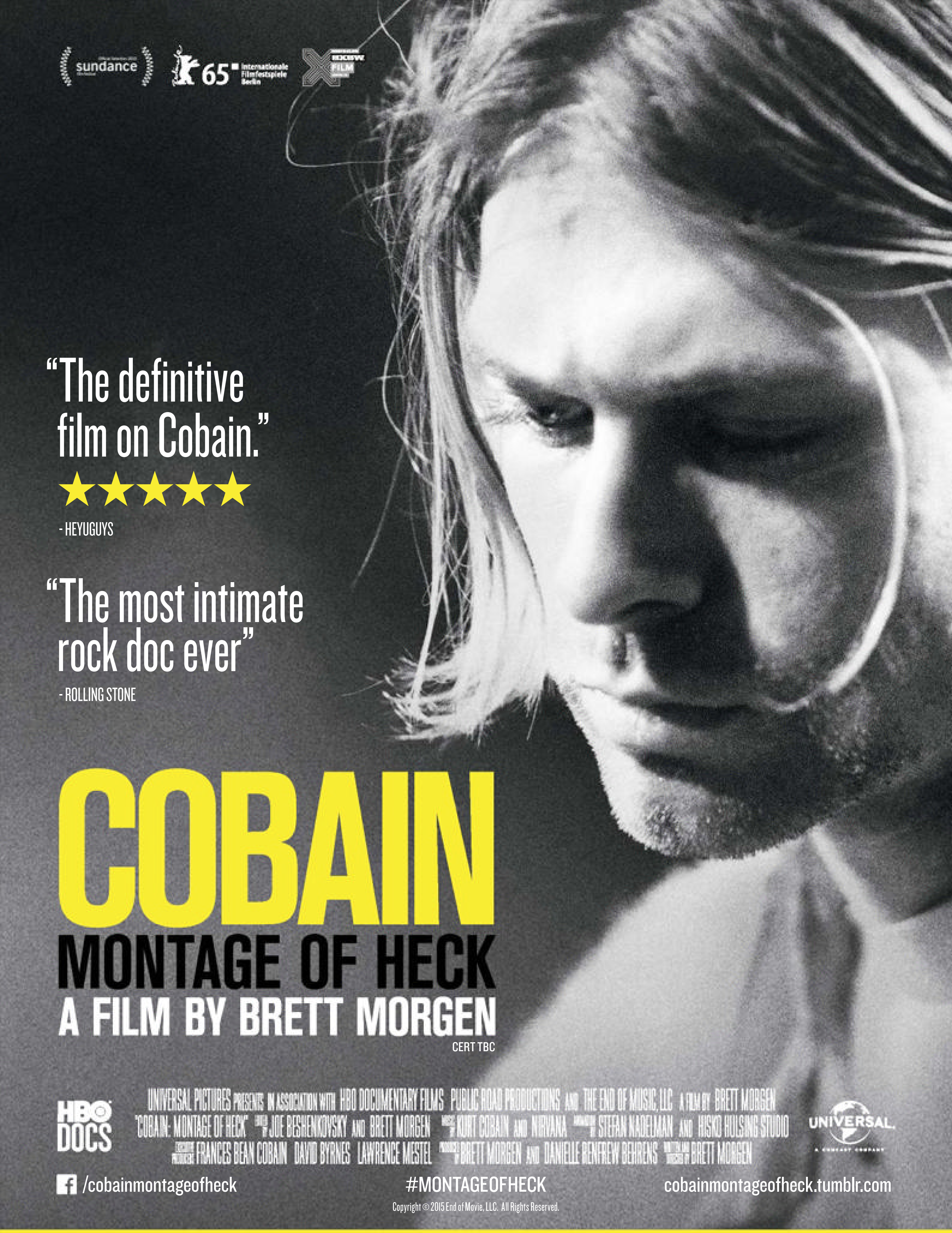
To mark its 50th anniversary, **Stan Tracey**'s classic Under Milk Wood – or more precisely, *Jazz Suite Inspired By Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood* – will be played in full by his drummer son **Clark** with original sax man **Bobby Wellins**, pianist **Steve Melling** and bassist **Andy Cleyndert**, at Ronnie Scott's in Soho. Narration is by Stan's grandson **Ben**. It's can also be seen at the Sage Gateshead on April 10.



APRIL 18

It's **Record Store Day**, the annual, nationwide beano of freshly released vinyl goodness (who's for a purple **Hawklords** LP and a *Never Mind The Bollocks* picture disc?). Go to recordstoreday.co.uk for full details of all releases, plus such associated events as **Stornoway** playing at Oxford's Truck Store and a bash at Manchester's Deaf Institute.

Simon Parfrement, Getty Images (3), Topfoto, Jamie Soja (sojaphotography.com)



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MOJOPLAYLIST

Saddle-up – a giant wave of garage rock pleading, Latin ska and menacing ambience is approaching…

1 GANGRENE (FT. SAMUEL T. HERRING AND EARL SWEATSHIRT)

PLAY IT COOL

Where California hip hop duo The Alchemist and Oh No enlist the Future Islands dancing master and the No Future rap talent for a jazz-hop walk on the dark side. With Earl Sweatshirt as wired urban narrator, Herring plays it deep and moody – of his versatile singing style, he told MOJO his influences are, "old R&B, doo wop, Blood Sweat And Tears, Elton John and, of course, Morrissey and Robert Smith." The track's from Gangrene's impending LP *Welcome To Los Santos*, which also features members of TV On The Radio, Little Dragon and Run The Jewels, and was inspired by the Grand Theft Auto V game.

Find it: *SoundCloud*

2 PETE DOHERTY FLAGS OF THE OLD REGIME

With rueful strings and girl group beats, it's Doherty in lachrymose mood at closing time, working up the energy for his lament for Amy Winehouse (proceeds go to her Foundation). Could he also be singing about himself?

Find it: *YouTube*

3 THE BEACH BOYS BIG SUR

One of the many discoveries in this month's Beach Boys feature was an earlier take on *Holland*'s Big Sur, in which Brian Wilson's vocal arrangement transforms Mike Love's California love letter into a blissful arcadian dream.

Find it: *YouTube* (LOOK FOR "LANDLOCKED VERSION")

4 KENDRICK LAMAR THE BLACKER THE BERRY

Compton's Grammy-bagging rap thinker brings a hyper-questioning rap track of feverish intensity, taking in societal racism, violence and hypocrisy. From his new album *To Pimp A Butterfly*.

Find it: *YouTube*

5 APHEX TWIN SELECTED AMBIENT WORKS 3 (UNOFFICIAL)

Richard D. James has stuck 156 tracks on his SoundCloud page. Who's got the time? Marc Weidenbaum of the electronic site disquiet.com has. Listen in for his connoisseur's selection of booms, shimmers and creeping dread.

Find it: *tinyurl.com/oandxa6*

6 LONELADY BUNKERPOP

Want to go to a terse yet ebullient dance party, in an abandoned concrete gun emplacement? The Manchester psychogeographer LoneLady has the soundtrack, evidence taken from her new album *Hinterland*.

Find it: *MOJO's covermount CD*

Thinking out of the icebox: Gangrene, aka The Alchemist (left) and Oh No give 'em a big hand; (below) LoneLady.

> "LONELADY SOUNDTRACKS A DANCE PARTY IN A CONCRETE GUN EMPLACEMENT."

ROKSAN MOJO listens to all its music on Roksan equipment

7 THE WHIG WHAMS BADDASS SID

Beautifully raw *Nuggets*-style garage rock filtered through the acid-bent minds of San Diego teenagers relocated to east London, pleading, "Can anybody get me off of this ride?"

Find It: *YouTube*

8 RON SEXSMITH CAN'T GET MY ACT TOGETHER

Expertly assembled, soulful – and somehow triumphant? – admission of uselessness from the understater of high-quality song. From newie *Carousel One*.

Find it: *YouTube*

9 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE (FT. VASHTI BUNYAN) IT'S YOU

The *Just Another Diamond Day* mystery woman joined Baltimore's art-hydra for the Prospect Hummer EP in 2005: impressionistic sounds and stream-of-consciousness whimsy resulted on the title track. It gets its debut vinyl release on Record Store Day.

Find it: *tinyurl.com/mxyvlvc*

10 THE MONTECRISTOS LOVE MISSILE F1-11

Where Neal X from Sigue Sigue Sputnik and band reboot his old band's ballistic 1986 hit, in T.Rex/Johnny Burnette rock'n'roll fashion. Available on 45 for Record Store Day.

Find it: *SoundCloud*

11 CARLOS MALCOLM'S AFRO JAMAICAN RHYTHMS VIVA ZAPATA

From 1964's topical *Let's Have A Red Stripe Party* LP, the trombonist/bandleader brings Latin prancing recorded by late JA studio legend Graeme Goodall.

Find it: *YouTube*

12 JACK Ü (FEAT. KIESZA) TAKE Ü THERE (MISSY ELLIOTT REMIX)

Commencing as soaring sing-into-the-hairbrush pop-dance, Missy Elliott soon takes control with stuttering beats, underground bass and stern instructions to "put your balls in the hoop".

Find it: *YouTube*

13 LE VOLUME COURBE THE HOUSE

From northwest France, Charlotte Marionneau brings winningly woozy French pop with an undertow of hypnagogic guitars, strings and electric viola (features Kevin Shields).

Find it: *SoundCloud*

14 UNDERWORLD VS HELLER & FARLEY BABY WANTS TO RIDE

JBO label vets cover Frankie Knuckles' club classic one year after the Godfather of House's passing. Proceeds go to Elton John's AIDS Foundation.

Find it: *www.babywantstoride.com*

15 ETCH THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW

Brighton producer blends '90s drum'n'bass lushness with mutated beats, taking you on a late-night-cab flight of the mind.

Find it: *SoundCloud*

16 COLDPLAY FIX YOU (FOUR TET REMIX)

Chris Martin's sensitive ode to apologising is only partially deranged by Kieran Hebden's egg whisks, squeaks and bells.

Find it: *YouTube*

17 COLIN STETSON AND SARAH NEUFELD THE SUN ROARS INTO VIEW

Avant-sax man and Arcade Fire's live fiddler combine for a time-suspension and spatial-stretching across seven-and-a-half increasingly intense minutes.

Find it: *SoundCloud*

18 THE STREETS WEAK BECOME HEROES

From 2002, a poignant memoir of raving with one-fingered piano and reflections on lost time, with the whiff of ashtrays.

Find it: *YouTube*

19 ELAINE HOLLAND, ROY STONE, THE GANG RIPPER'S GOING TO GET YOU

If Spinal Tap finished Saucy Jack it could have sounded like this jolly list of bloody slaughter, from Ron Pember's Brechtian deconstruction of the 1888 murders.

Find it: *stagedoorrecords.com*

20 THE UNTOUCHABLES TROPICAL BIRD

The 2 Tone boom has died – what to do? If you were these SoCal rudies, you just carried on as if nothing had happened, as this fleet-footed Beat-like 1983 instrumental proves.

Find it: *YouTube*

SELFPORTRAIT

TRACEY THORN

The singer and woman of letters in her own words and by her own hand.

Tracey Thorn inside her wardrobe, by Tracey Thorn.

I would describe myself as… shy, talkative, opinionated, easily scared, bookish, emotional, calm, panicky. Extremely organised, to the point of being controlling. Punctual. A good listener. Someone who enjoys holidays, clothes, food and drink. Very full of love for the ones I love.

Music changed me… from an introverted wallflower who sang her first audition inside a wardrobe, into an introverted wallflower stranded in the glare at the front of the stage, singing for her life. But at least with some means of expressing all the things I felt inside, which might otherwise have stayed hidden forever. In that sense, I don't think music changed me, so much as found me.

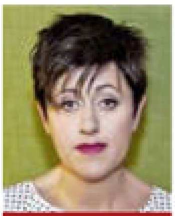
When I'm not making music… I'm reading, writing, talking, shopping, cooking, walking, watching telly. *Very* occasionally on Twitter.

My biggest vice is… an inability to leave the party. Which is why I rarely go to parties.

The last time I felt embarrassed was… probably about five minutes ago. I'm overly self-aware and constantly checking to see if I've put my foot in it or made a fool of myself. I say, "God you're an idiot" to myself about a hundred times a day. Affectionately. But still.

My formal qualifications are… O-Levels and A-Levels. I got into uni with an A, C and E. Not sure that's possible any more. Once there, I picked up the pace, and got a First Class Honours degree in Eng Lit, and then later an MA in Modern Eng Lit. I also have a Pitman's touch-typing certificate, being of that generation when girls were encouraged to learn secretarial skills as "something to fall back on". It means I now hammer away at my keyboard very speedily while looking elsewhere. Quite fancy.

The last time I cried was… over some crisis or other to do with one of the kids. Parenting teenagers is as difficult as everyone tells you it will be. They are wonderful creatures but their lives tend to be full of melodrama and incident. Their ups are very up, their downs very down, and as a parent you have to try to remain calm in the face of daily traumas, reminding yourself that most of them will be better in a day or two. Seeing them sad makes me cry.



> **"VINYL, CD OR MP3? HONESTLY COULDN'T GIVE A FUCK."**

Vinyl, CD or MP3… Honestly couldn't give a fuck. I am no kind of sonic nerd *at all*, and have no strong feelings about the supposed merits of vinyl over CD. All I remember from the old days is that when you finished making a record and heard it for the first time on vinyl, it was disappointing. Something seemed to have been lost, or compromised. So I'm sceptical about its current elevated status, and dubious about claims that it is the "best" way to hear recorded music. In truth, I haven't bought a physical record or CD in years. I listen to an iPod on headphones, while I walk.

My most prized possession… is the collection of photos and videos of the kids growing up. I'd be very sorry to lose those.

The best book I've ever read is… impossible to choose.

Is the glass half full or half empty… Definitely half full, that's never really a problem for me. What *is* a problem is the amount of time I waste worrying that the glass might be about to explode. Or that it's been filled with poison. Or that it's not my glass at all and I've accidentally stolen someone else's and am about to be arrested. You get the picture.

My biggest regret is… that I wasn't born a little braver. But we'd all like to be a little somethinger.

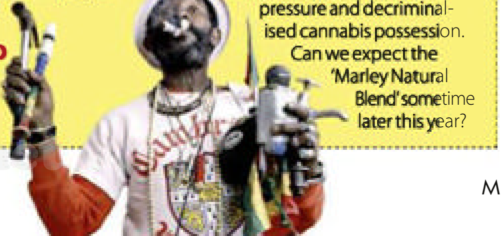
When we die… we rest in peace.

I'd like to be remembered… with a raised Martini.

Tracey's Songs From The Falling EP is out on Strange Feeling Records on April 27.

MONDOMOJO

…in March, **HALL AND OATES** (below) took legal action against the Early Bird Foods "artisanal granola" company of Brooklyn, who selling a Haulin' Oats range at $27 for three packets! The duo allege the name was chosen to "trade off of the fame and notoriety" of *their* moniker… **WU-TANG CLAN**'s **Method Man** is unimpressed that the group's LP *The Wu – Once Upon A Time In Shaolin* will only be publicly released in 2103, after its sole copy has been sold in a silver box to a deep-pocketed super-fan. "If they're doing crap like that," he told rap site XXL, "fuck that album." Discussions may continue during a UK and Europe tour this summer… a vinyl heads-up: the **MIYAJIMA** company of Japan's new Madake stereo cartridge is now available in the UK – its USP is a special cantilever made with bamboo from Mount Otokoyama in Kyoto! They're only £3,750 each… applause for music fan **Martyn Webster**, whose crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for North Carolina vocalist/saxman **RICHARD SPENCER**, the last living creative mind behind the massively-sampled Amen breakbeat, had received almost £17,000 at press time… Free Up The Weed, demanded **LEE PERRY** (left); **The Lone Ranger** agreed, suggesting Legalize The National Herb. Jamaica has now bowed to reggae pressure and decriminalised cannabis possession. Can we expect the 'Marley Natural Blend' sometime later this year?



Rex, Photoshot

Hobart full of soul: Courtney Barnett seeks out inspiration in the everyday.

MOJORISING

COURTNEY BARNETT

Riffs and free-association, from Australian singer-as-diarist.

Courtney Barnett has been having trouble sleeping. Calling from her home in Melbourne, she sounds dazed, but curiously amused at her discombobulated state – much as she did on Avant Gardener, the rambling five-minute ode that launched her to online viral stardom in 2013. There, in an unforgettable free-associative voice, Barnett tells of how she suffered a life-threatening asthma attack in 40-degree heat. "I'm breathin' but I'm wheezin', feel like I'm emphysem-in'," she drawls, "I'd rather die than owe the hospital."

If that song has been greeted like a Generation Y answer to Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues, Ms Barnett has justified the hype with two albums' worth of equally striking music – *The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas*, and this month's debut proper, *Sometimes I Sit And Think, And Sometimes I Just Sit*. Each showcases the 26-year-old's predilection for Velvet Underground-rooted narrative riff-rock, and arresting lyrical scenarios.

"It's all pretty real-based," she croaks down the line. "Is that even a word? It's just stuff I see and do, like a little musical diary of my life."

Her literate songwriting approach stems from her upbringing: she was raised in Sydney by arty parents – Mum was a ballet dancer, Dad a graphic designer. "I read a lot as a child, often with a torch under the blankets after I was supposed to go to sleep." Her folks were into jazz and classical, so she learnt about rock from her elder brother, and her guitar teacher. "I remember hearing *The Modern Lovers*, and thinking, What the fuck is this? The same with Stephen Malkmus – on one Jicks album he mentions Birkenstocks. I love words that pop out at you. Otherwise it's so boring and repetitive, what's the point?"

> "I LOVE WORDS THAT POP OUT AT YOU. OTHERWISE, WHAT'S THE POINT?"

When her parents relocated the family to Hobart, in Tasmania, Barnett started airing her first songs at open-mike nights. Five years ago, she finished a fine-art degree, and left "Tazzy" for Melbourne, where she joined grunge combo Rapid Transit, then the more country-tinged Immigrant Union, which morphed into her current solo band.

The new record, cut live in eight days, is by her own admission "really all over the place, but that's great".

Perhaps it's the sleep deprivation, but Courtney's vague about the writing process. "Music's always funny," she says, "it just happens." However much they may seem like they fell straight from her brain onto the lyric sheet, the words are keenly sculpted – apart from new single Pedestrian At Best, where time constraints in the studio dictated the writing and recording processes.

"That one's just a huge mess of everything that was in my head – tiredness, frustration, relationships – just life, really." Let's hope this "real-based" thing catches on.

Andrew Perry

Courtney Barnett plays the Green Man Festival held in the Brecon Beacons, August 20-23

FACT SHEET

- For fans of… Modern Lovers, Go-Betweens, Pavement.
- The album title *Sometimes I Sit And Think, And Sometimes I Just Sit* is a modified quote from Winnie The Pooh author, A.A. Milne.
- One song, Depreston, concerns a house Barnett viewed in a Melbourne suburb. "I just had an emotional moment thinking about the dead person who'd lived there before."

KEY TRACKS

- Avant Gardener
- Aqua Profunda!
- Debbie Downer

MINDBLOWERS!

DAVID HOLMES

The DJ, musician, director and film composer chooses five wild gems of *musique concrète*, protean techno and French music-school improv.

1 LE LUNEUX MUSIQUES A L'ÉCOLE

(C.E.S. Charles Fauqueux album, year unknown)

"I picked this up in France a few months ago. Charles Fauqueux is this super-cool music teacher who got all his pupils together and did explorations into sound, melody and different instrumentation. It's unGoogleable, this record, and it cost me a lot of money. It's kind of improvisations with naïve schoolchildren using organ drones, percussion, celeste, tabla and recorders. A lot of magic in music comes from naivety, from trying to feel your way through something, where instinct is taking over. Le Luneux is like this lost Morricone theme that could easily sit in The Exorcist or Once Upon A Time In The West. It's fantastic. An absolute gem and a constant source of inspiration for me."

2 LENA PLATONOS SHADOWS OF BLOOD

(from Gkalop, Lyra, 1985)

"This is this a really seductive piece of dark Greek electro from 1985. It was reissued by some friends of mine on a German label, Kunstkopf in 2013, just 100 copies. Over the last 25 years, the three DJ sets that were life-changing moments were all when Andrew Weatherall was behind the decks and this is something I imagine Weatherall playing at Shoom at 4am, or you can imagine hearing it at Amnesia, in Ibiza, at 4am, in 1989. Although it's quite mechanical it has a real swing to it. And because of the Greek spoken-word I haven't got a fucking clue what she's talking about but it's just really beautiful and sexy and dark and cinematic."

3 BAND APART EVE RYONNE

(from Band Apart 12-inch, Crammed Discs, 1983)

"This track by this New York outfit came out on a six-track mini-LP from 1982 on Crammed Discs, a label run by Marc Hollander and Aksak Maboul. They've been very influential. Aksak Maboul also made this track called Saure Gurke in 1977 which sounds like a lost Neal Howard or Derrick May tune, just drum machine and synth. Proto dance music. But this is My Bloody Valentine seven years earlier. The vocals are almost Ian Curtisy but it's got a rich treatment of distortion and harmonics, building layers of guitars. It sounds as fresh now as I'm sure it did when it first came out."

4 JOHN PAUL JONES 4 MINUTE WARNING

(from Various: Music For Films III, All Saints, 1988)

"I used to play this at Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where the CineFamily organisation put on these parties every Saturday: you lay on your blanket nibbling mushrooms, drinking wine and hearing these records through this incredible sound system. As the sun was going down I'd drop 4 Minute Warning, this amazing cacophony of horns and percussion. Like a hunt. It's the only track I've ever played with no beats and when it finishes the whole place erupts. I made short film recently, called I Am Here, inspired by the passing of my brother. I wrote John Paul Jones a letter asking permission to use the track for the opening. He loved the film and let me use it for a couple of hundred quid. It just fitted like a glove."

5 GROUPE DE RECHERCHES MUSICALES DE LA RTF MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE

(BAM LP, 1960)

"I'm a massive *musique concrète* fan. It's the first form of sampling, going back to 1945. This one album has all the heavyweights, Xenakis, Luc Ferrari, Pierre Schaeffer. You hear so much creativity within the world of *musique concrète*. I'm really interested in the idea of non-musical sound in film music, using the sound of our environment as the actual soundtrack. A lot of the problem I have with film music is when it's wall-to-wall music and you're insulting the audience by constantly telling them what to think. This is where sampling started, not hip hop. I wish more people knew about that. And the French were making so many original electronic compositions long before way before the word 'techno' had ever been invented."

Bring it on, Holmes: a '90s era David puffs on a Gauloises, digs the *concrète*.

As told to Andrew Male. Photoshot

Yann Demange's '71, with David Holmes's soundtrack, is out now on DVD and Blu-ray

What's it all about, Salford: Graham Gouldman, rejecting the "soft rock" tag.

Rex

ROCK'N'ROLLCONFIDENTIAL

GRAHAM GOULDMAN

The 10cc linchpin on writing big hits, Morrissey and "fucking disasters."

Graham Gouldman is in the front room of his north London home, quietly enjoying The Fraternal Order Of The All, a little-known project from 1997, featuring the late Andrew Gold, Gouldman's partner in '80s duo Wax. One of the tracks, a Gold-Gouldman co-write, is a lovely piece of latterday baroque pop.

But when it comes to complexity and studio wizardry, the one on top of the CD pile by his record player is hard to beat: *Sheet Music*, 1974's maddeningly inventive 10cc album that sole original member Gouldman and his band are performing live in May. He's been learning every note. Particularly tricky was Clockwork Creep, perhaps the only pop song about a bomb on a plane written from the point of view of the bomb, with its multiple transitions and hard-to-fathom tempo. Amusingly, Noel Gallagher currently stands accused of echoing the melody for his Ballad Of The Mighty I from Bus Stop, Gouldman's 1966 hit for The Hollies. Will Gouldman litigate? The songwriter shrugs and smiles, as though to say, 'Why bother?' There's plenty more where that came from.

Is it true you wrote your first song while working in a gentlemen's outfitters?

Yes. I was measuring inside legs [in Bargains Unlimited, Salford] when I wrote For Your Love [for The Yardbirds]. I was inspired by The Animals' House Of The Rising Sun. The chord sequence was the reverse of the usual blues one and it blew my mind. I used that minor to major sequence for No Milk Today [Herman's Hermits], Behind The Door [Cher] and Pamela Pamela [Wayne Fontana]. We wouldn't be talking today if it hadn't been for those chords. My manager, Harvey Lisberg, wanted me to get it to The Beatles. I said (*drily*), "The Beatles do write their own songs, you know?" But The Yardbirds liked it. Eric Clapton left the band soon after. It wasn't my fault, but I think it was the last straw.

Then, in 1969, you started working for American bubblegum hit-makers Kasenetz-Katz…

That was an artistic low-point. I went to New York and it was fun for a while. I told them I wanted to use Strawberry Studios in Stockport as my base – me and Eric Stewart were joint owners, and Lol Creme and Kevin [Godley] were there, so we started writing under a variety of names. Around that time, Kevin, Lol and Eric, as Hotlegs, had a worldwide hit with Neanderthal Man. They were testing a 4-track tape machine, Lol was just strumming and singing this nonsense. In walks Dick Leahy of Phonogram and says, "It's a hit!" Then the production team became a band: when the studio wasn't being used [by clients including

GOULDMAN'S GREATS

GG's Top 5 must-hears

1 **Ben Howard** *I Forget Where We Were* (ISLAND, 2014)
2 **Robert Plant** *Band Of Joy* (DECCA, 2010)
3 **Ron Sexsmith** *Long Player Late Bloomer* (COOKING VINYL, 2011)
4 **alt-J** *An Awesome Wave* (INFECTIOUS, 2012)
5 **Paul Simon** *Graceland* (WARNERS, 1986)

WorldMags

Neil Sedaka and Pharaohnic Yorkshireman Rameses] we'd fuck around, write songs and record them. 10cc were born. It's like the planets aligned.

Roger Taylor insists Queen never heard Une Nuit A Paris (the tripartite pop opera that opens 10cc's 1975 album *The Original Soundtrack*) before recording Bohemian Rhapsody. Thoughts?

We did a gig with Queen in Liverpool – I'm sure they heard it. We were quite like them in terms of production values and song construction. But even they didn't have three Number 1s with three different singers [Creme sang Rubber Bullets, Stewart I'm Not In Love, Gouldman Dreadlock Holiday], or four multi-instrumental producer-singer-writers.

Do you hate the 10cc as 'Guilty Pleasures' thing?

It's nonsense. And 'soft rock' – what the fuck is that all about? Listen to I Wanna Rule The World [featuring Creme as crazed dictator]. That's not soft, it's mad! Even I'm Not In Love was an anti-love song. Kevin told me Johnny Rotten was a big fan of *Sheet Music*.

What did you make of Morrissey's cover of your song East West?

I loved it. There was something very Mancunian about it. He even added a verse. My songs aren't usually very coverable. If I'd written a song like Natural Woman, I'd be happy. The song I'm proudest of is Bus Stop.

You're still friends with Kevin, but not Eric. When were you last in a room together?

At the 2004 Ivor Novello awards, where we won for Outstanding Song Collection, someone didn't want to attend. It's pathetic. We would never accept an offer to reform, because I know it would never happen. It's more than a shame. It's a fucking disaster.

Is it odd doing 10cc alone?

I'll never record as 10cc, but to go out as a live band isn't odd at all. People tell me I'm keeping the music alive. And if you don't like it, fuck you.

What's the truth, once and for all, about the name?

Jonathan King had a dream of a hoarding saying, "10cc – the best band in the world." We loved the alternative story [that 9cc was the average amount of male ejaculate, and 10cc were above average]. I had some relatives round the other day and someone wanted to know. It was so good to see (*the looks of horror*).

Tell us something you've never told a journalist before.

If you don't want your bathroom to steam up, put cold water in the bath first, then hot water.

Paul Lester

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

EAST INDIA YOUTH

Will Doyle on of Montreal's 2007 opus *Hissing Fauna, Are You The Destroyer?*

I was 16, just starting college in Southampton. I'd been listening to a lot of regrettable emo rock, but I'd just recently come to My Bloody Valentine. One of my friends used to tour manage of Montreal, and he said, "You've got to hear this."

At first I felt that I didn't like it, but as soon as it finished I wanted to put it on again. It really explodes, there are so many hooks it's like you're straight on the roller coaster and plunged into the world of the record – there's no going back and you can't turn it off. There were a lot of very poppy, melodic moments, but then I realised that lyrically it's really dark, very confessional stuff, about how [of Montreal brain] Kevin Barnes had been living in Norway with his wife and child, and there was this break-up. He'd started to get depressive, quite suicidal thoughts; I don't think he knew how he'd ended up living in this bleak winter landscape. The centrepiece of the record is The Past Is A Grotesque Animal. It's about 12 minutes long, very sort of motorik, and the lyrics really cut to the heart of what the album's about: he goes through a transformation to his alter ego, Georgie Fruit, a black transsexual in his forties who used to be in a funk band called Arousal. The perspective totally shifts, but it's still him dealing with his personal issues, but through the filter of this persona.

It really affected me creatively – it was inspiring that something of such dense personal genius could be made by one person on a computer – but it also helped me sort of define parts of my personality, how it deals with his depression and his strange psycho-sexual angst… he's very solitary and driven by his work, and it's hard for him to cultivate the intimate relationships that other people – normal people – would do. This was stuff I related to.

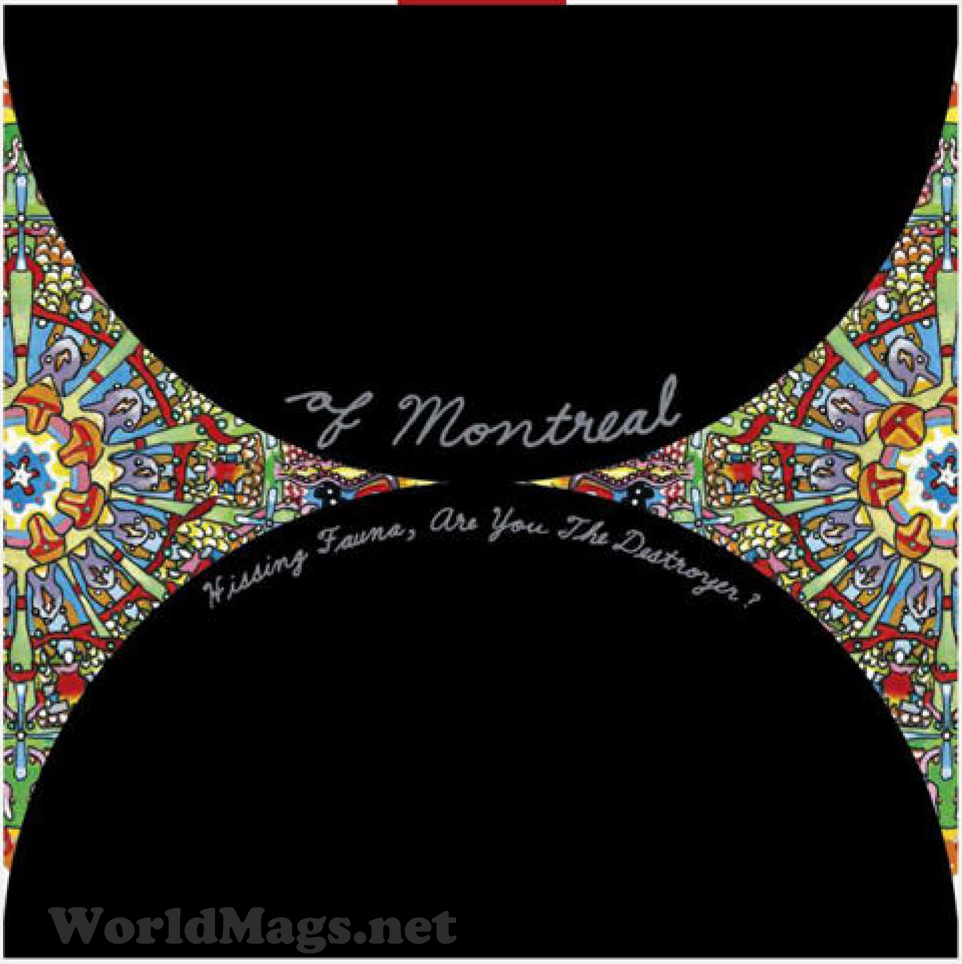
I don't think a month's gone by when I don't put it on and I still get the same emotional kick out of it. When I go and see them now I'm there in the middle, singing my lungs out. I cherish those moments when I feel music is the strangest, most wonderful, alien thing in the world, and this album totally encapsulates that for me. Speaking now, I think I've covered my full gamut of emotions about it, short of crying.

Ian Harrison

Culture Of Volume is out on XL on April 6

Occidents will happen: (below) William Doyle gets ready to explode.

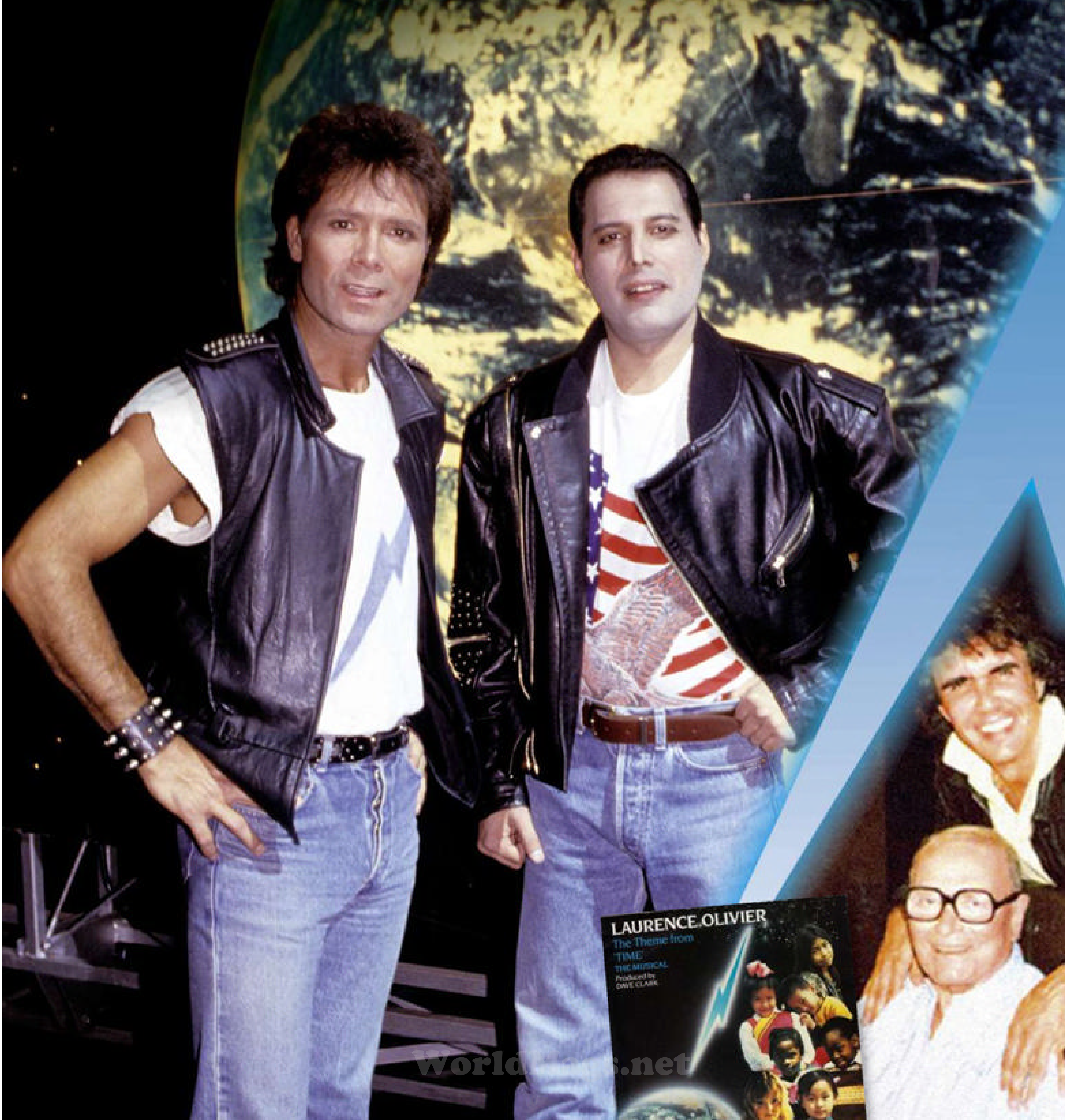
"YOU'RE STRAIGHT ON THE ROLLER COASTER – THERE'S NO GOING BACK AND YOU CAN'T TURN IT OFF."

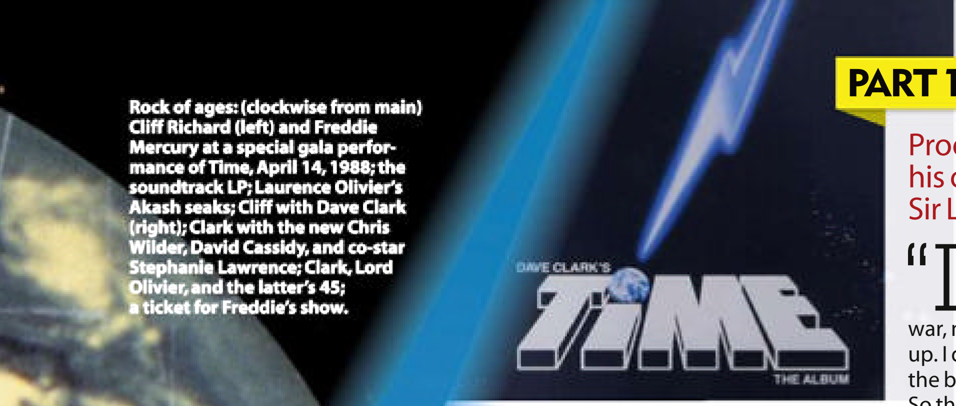

of Montreal
Hissing Fauna, Are You The Destroyer?

MOJO EYEWITNESS

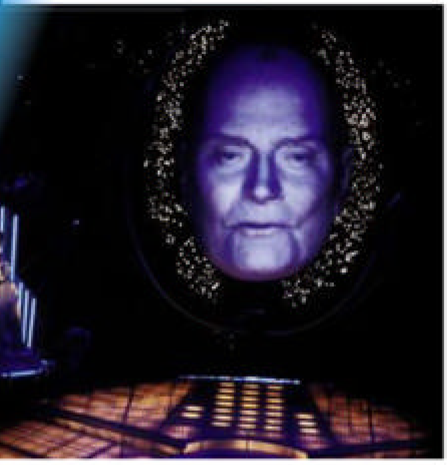
DAVE CLARK'S TIME THE MUSICAL, 1986

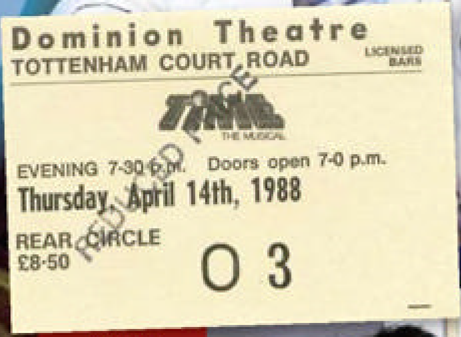
On April 9, a new show at London's Dominion Theatre put Cliff Richard on trial at the High Court Of The Universe – with Laurence Olivier as the god-like Akash, The Ultimate Word In Truth. Freddie Mercury and Stevie Wonder got involved as well. But how, by the sign of infinity, did this happen?


LAURENCE OLIVIER
The Theme from
'TIME'
THE MUSICAL
Produced by
DAVE CLARK



Rock of ages: (clockwise from main) Cliff Richard (left) and Freddie Mercury at a special gala performance of Time, April 14, 1988; the soundtrack LP; Laurence Olivier's Akash seaks; Cliff with Dave Clark (right); Clark with the new Chris Wilder, David Cassidy, and co-star Stephanie Lawrence; Clark, Lord Olivier, and the latter's 45; a ticket for Freddie's show.





Dominion Theatre
TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD
LICENSED BARS
TiME
THE MUSICAL
EVENING 7-30 p.m. Doors open 7-0 p.m.
Thursday, April 14th, 1988
REAR CIRCLE
£8-50
O 3

“THIS FLYING SAUCER COMES TOWARDS YOU, PLANETS BEGIN DROPPING AND THIS MAGNIFICENT HEAD APPEARS...”
Dave Clark

PART 1 “EVERYBODY WENT CRAZY.”

Producer/mastermind Dave Clark on his original cosmic vision, drinks with Sir Larry and spending £4million.

“I thought it'd be great to make a musical about another planet where everything is timeless and everybody's ageless, where there's no disease, no war, no famine. But they realise that the Earth is screwing up. I decided the best person to speak for Earth would be the biggest rock star in the world [character Chris Wilder]. So the idea was to have him in the middle of a concert in front of thousands of people and all of a sudden everything gets frozen and he's transported to the High Court Of The Universe to speak on behalf of the Earth.

A musical is about the song, so I made a demo album of it. I was in LA and played it to Stevie Wonder and he was so knocked out with it he said, ‘I'll record two songs [for the soundtrack album].’ I played it to Dionne Warwick and she said, ‘I love it.’ Freddie Mercury committed immediately.

Now, Cliff [Richard] had wanted to do a musical for years but had never found a vehicle. Laurence Olivier was always my first choice for [the narrator] Akash. I went to his house in Chelsea and it was all very formal. The script was there and he had meticulously dog-eared every page he had dialogue on. He said, ‘Mm, well if I was to consider doing this, I'd have to drop my voice an octave like I did in Othello.’ I said, ‘Lord Olivier, if you do that, you're totally wrong for the part.’ He went, ‘I beg your pardon?’ He got quite agitated. I said, ‘Akash is what everybody epitomises as their favourite uncle or a loving God giving words of wisdom. If you drop your voice an octave, it becomes dictatorial.’ He said, ‘Good point, forget the tea, let's have a drink.’

It took six weeks to film him for the show. His head as it appeared wasn't a hologram and I've never let on how it was done. We sprayed the inside of the Dominion Theatre black. In the middle of the rock concert, all of a sudden there was this terrible rumble and this 40-foot flying saucer comes towards you. Planets begin dropping and then this magnificent head appears and he says, ‘Welcome to the high court of the universe. Don't be alarmed.’ Everybody just went crazy.

I built a proper recording studio under the stage and got the best session musicians. I paid for the whole production myself. The problem with special effects is you don't know what's gonna happen. I had a budget for it, but if something doesn't work, you've got to improvise. To get investors in, it was getting too complicated. It's crazy, really, looking back, but it was three-and-a-half million. Then we spent another half a million on promotion.

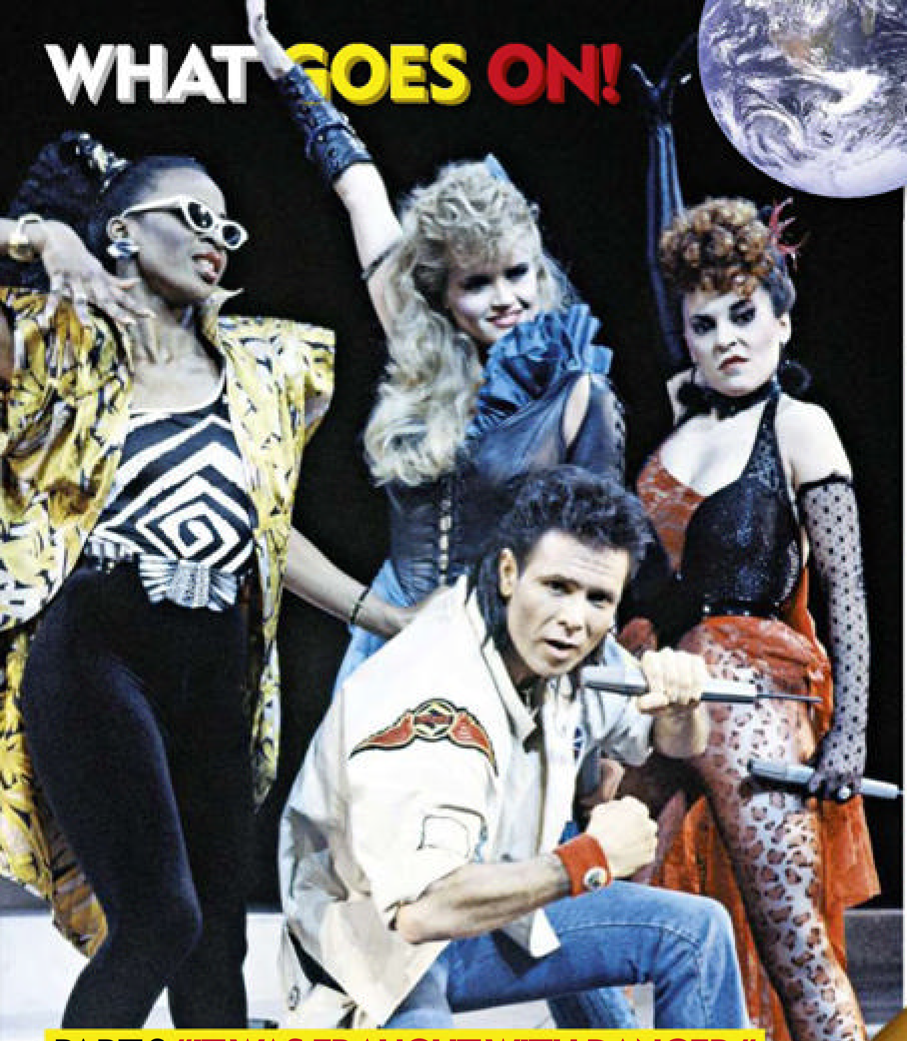
I don't remember a lot about the opening night. I think I was numb. The reviews were amazing, which blew me away. The only problem we ever had was when one of the insurance people came down to inspect the set and went down one of the hatches and slipped and pulled somebody down with him and broke his leg, so we had to cancel the performance.

We couldn't let Olivier come to the opening night because it would've given the illusion away. So we had one matinee where we didn't sell the dress circle – that way he wouldn't be bothered. And, of course, when people knew he was there they went crazy and he stood up like a king. He just waved for 10 minutes.

Cliff was in it for a year and then we had David Cassidy in for six months. It played for over a million people. The reason it closed [in April 1988] was because we had a problem with the theatre. They were gonna knock it down or sell it and it was a nightmare. But I think the message of Time still applies to today. It's the maimed and the crippled who are left to build broken lives after each confrontation.”

Nobby Clark/ArenaPal (2), PA, Alpha Press

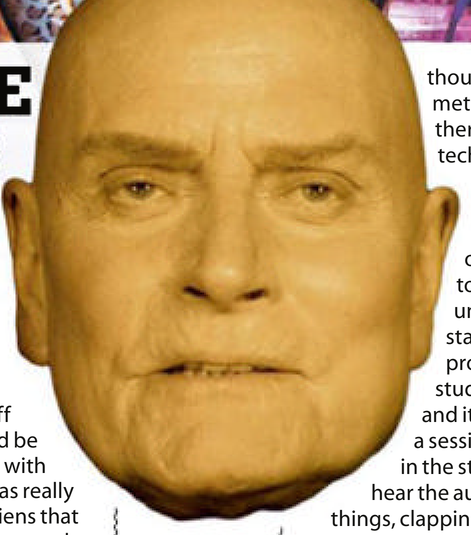
TURN OVER! HOUSE MUSICIANS RAY RUSSELL AND MIKE MORAN RECALL INNOVATION AND WINGING IT.



PART 2 "IT WAS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER."

DAVE CLARK'S TIME THE MUSICAL, 1986

Crack sessioneers Mike Moran and Ray Russell on Cliff, playing below-stage and hovering aliens.

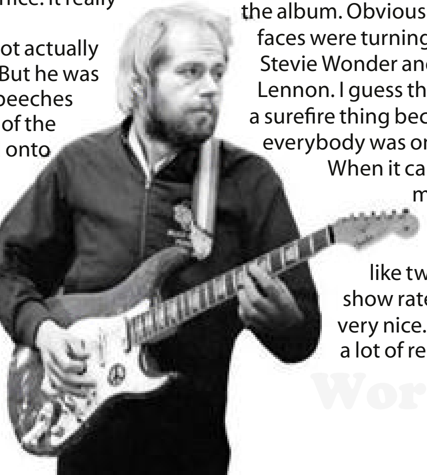


MIKE MORAN (musical director): "I was involved with Time right from the outset, collecting songs and looking at the style of the show and designs. We did the album at the same time as setting the show up, which was a crazy idea really.

Cliff was approached because the story is of A Rock Star, and in the mid '80s Cliff was mega big all over the world, maybe apart from the United States. It was a bit of a coup, 'cos Cliff has a massive fan club as well and that guarantees you a certain amount of presence in the box office. It really was a logical fit.

Larry Olivier was not actually that well, to be frank. But he was amazing. When the speeches were filmed, because of the way he was projected onto this 15-foot-high three-dimensional head, it had to be absolutely in sync and lined up with the head within a fraction of a millimetre to make it all work properly. Larry had to be almost cemented into a chair so he wouldn't move. It didn't always work 100 per cent. If you were slightly off with the lining up on the camera, you'd find his nose three foot to the right.

It was groundbreaking stuff technically. Nowadays it would be so much easier 'cos you'd do it with video mapping. But, man, it was really analogue. There were three aliens that looked like they were floating around, but actually they were on three of those platforms you see engineers using when they're fixing a power cable."



RAY RUSSELL (guitarist): "I knew Mike and we'd done lots of sessions together. He asked me to come and do the album. Obviously a lot of faces were turning up, like Stevie Wonder and Julian Lennon. I guess the album was a surefire thing because everybody was on it.

When it came to the musical itself, we got paid something like twice the going show rate, which was very nice. It was quite a lot of rehearsal though. It was very meticulous because there was a lot of technology for the time. It was fraught with danger, really.

We couldn't go on-stage so they had to remake the underneath of the stage as a big sound-proofed recording studio. We had cans on and it was just like doing a session. We had speakers in the studio so we could hear the audience's reaction to things, clapping and whatever.

Laurence Olivier's head was the most adventurous thing ever. There was one matinee where I had a dep[uty], so I was actually watching the show. That particular afternoon the film wasn't shining on the head, so there was this thing moving around completely blank and the image of Laurence Olivier pointing to a corner. It was absolutely hilarious. When it went wrong, it was spectacularly wrong.

Once we got into the actual run, there were all sorts of things going on. I seem to remember there was a problem with tickets where it could appear sold out and it wasn't.

For something that was so successful and pushing so many boundaries, it's strange it just came to an end because of all the other more mundane logistics."

Tom Doyle

(Clockwise from main) (from left) Dawn Hope (Babs), Jackie Wilson (Louise), Maria Ventura (Carol) with Cliff aka Rock Star Chris Wilder; Lord Melchisedic played by Jeff Shankley; Mike Moran; in action; Sir Larry as Akash; Ray Russell.

> **"WHEN IT WENT WRONG, IT WAS SPECTACULARLY WRONG."**
> **Ray Russell**

Nobby Clark/ArenaPal (3), Rex, Topfoto

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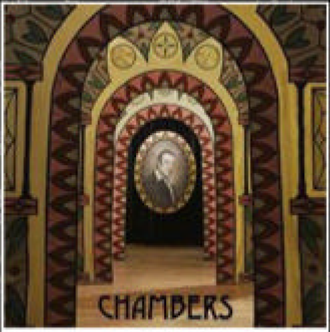

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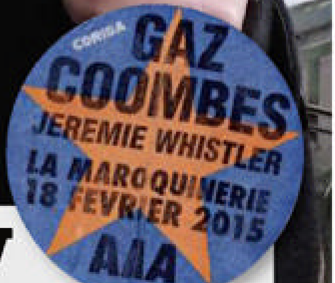


ON THE ROAD

HEAR THE GRASS GROW

Riding high on his *Matador* album, Gaz Coombes hits Brussels and Paris and talks about booze, bollocks and personal rebirth.

It's a wintry afternoon in Paris's magnificent Père Lachaise cemetery, and talk of famous incumbent Jim Morrison of The Doors has given Gaz Coombes an idea. "I should fake my own death," he suggests, perkily. "Then the album could *really* sell…"

Despite feeling a little "fatigued" – the reason for Coombes wearing dark shades in daylight – the former Supergrass singer is in a fizzy mood. Etched in the public mind as a laid-back, rather private soul, Gaz is actually a laugh a minute. His famously mischievous feline/simian fizzog and nicely spoken Oxford tones – tinged with rock-star dropped 'h's – are never far from expressing boyish misbehaviour.

As he draws attention to one of his testicles peeking through a rip in his strides, a female attendant races over to admonish us for lounging on a gravestone. Gaz stubs out his fag and flashes a happy-go-lucky, ice-melting smile. "My bollock is *fucking* freezing," he proudly complains, drama over.

Although he was (almost) the last man standing on the tour bus last night, this morning Coombes was also among the first to surface, soundtracking our drive out of Brussels with a cod in-flight "We are flying at 32,000 feet" commentary.

MOJO laughs, but wonders: is this the man who has just delivered *Matador*, one of the most emotionally piquant and melodically bewitching albums of the past 12 months or so? A modern psychedelic record so beautiful, nuanced and soul-manifesting it can provoke tears? Is this the right Gaz Coombes?

Privacy on a tour bus is a contradiction, but earlier, on the drive between Brussels and Paris, Coombes and MOJO find themselves alone at last in the kitchenette. The previous night, at Le Botanique, an arts complex in central Brussels, the singer had played to a 300-strong crowd packed into a circular theatre space.

The healthy ticket sales reflected the extraordinary grass-roots reaction that *Matador* has provoked. His second solo album, following 2012's *Here Come The Bombs*, oozes powerful – and perhaps unexpectedly personal – meditations on death, love, parenthood and fame. It is, without doubt, his mid-life minor masterpiece.

But now, with tape running, it takes a minute or two for Coombes to drop his bantering guard – a defence mechanism, it seems, for an adult life lived in the public gaze.

Taken under the wing of Radiohead's management aged 15, and an international star three years later in 1995 when Supergrass hit big with the evergreen Alright, he has preferred to keep his personal travails private.

The City of Light is Sideburnin': (main) Gaz Coombes outside the Gambetta Paris Metro stop; (left) having une clope at Père Lachaise; (right) AAA pass; (below) en route to the gig.

> "WE ALL HAD OUR MOMENTS IN SUPERGRASS... WE ALL FUCKED UP AND TOOK SOME KNOCKS."

"We all had our moments in Supergrass," he explains, studying the sub-zero fog outside. "[Drummer] Danny [Goffey] had his tabloid thing [salacious red top reports of 'swinging' with then couple Jude Law and Sadie Frost], but we all fucked up and took some knocks, whether it was drugs, creative pressures, whatever. We just didn't want to shout about it. Those old Beatles press conferences were a model for us – we liked the humour and surreal edges. A lot of the American bands when we were growing up annoyed us, that grandeur."

After the band's split in 2010 [see panel], Coombes finally had time to reflect on the joy, pain and madness of his experiences. Asked to explain *Matador*'s alluring mood of loss, adriftness and longing, Coombes, now 39, talks about the long shadow cast by his mother's death in 2005, an event referenced in the roiling, emotional song To The Wire. By that time, Supergrass had been recording and touring constantly for a decade.

"When my mum died it brought me a lot closer to death and my own mortal-

Mick Hutson (11), Alamy

Buffalo
Sub Divider
Seven Walls
Needles Eye
These Days
White Noise
O.W.F.T.E.
Fanfare
Hot Fruit
20/20
Detroit
English Ruse
To The Wire
Matador
Break The Silence

ity," he says. "That was pretty tough for me, as a 27-year-old, after 10 years of riding this mad wave and not giving a thought about anyone else. Then life comes and smacks you round the face. You have kids, things gets loads more complicated. Some of it freaks you out, some of it makes you think, I'm happier than I ever have been. We're all trying to make sense of these things."

Coombes stresses that Supergrass's songwriting was highly collaborative, with members sometimes taking turns to contribute lines to a lyric, so his solo records have dictated a more individual approach. The *Matador* track Detroit, for instance, alludes to a mid-tour crack-up, but is also a hymn to his love for his wife and family.

"I love a lot of those Lennon songs, those mad solo records where he was screaming," he says. "I guess he was becoming a single voice after being in a band, and so am I, though I'm not comparing myself to him. I know I've become a better lyric writer in the last three years – I know that I can do it."

The tape goes off, and we sit in silence. Coombes spies photographer Mick Hutson asleep on the couch. "Shall I stick my balls in his mouth?" he suggests, easing back into the amusing world of public, playful Gaz.

Oxford karma: (clockwise from top left) Paris setlist; ironing in the toilette; La Maroquinerie crowd; the band (from left) Nick 'Growler' Fowler (guitar), Ben Walker (keyboards), Gaz, Garo Nahoulakian (bass), Loz Colbert (drums); on-stage; on the bus; live in Brussels; backstage; (below right) Danny, Gaz and Mick of Supergrass.

At La Maroquinerie, a medium-sized venue near the cemetery, pre-show nerves are in evidence. It's the last night of the tour, and the noise from the sold-out crowd can be heard backstage. Coombes fidgets with his hair, paces and toys with a setlist, conspicuously devoid of any Supergrass tunes; he also entertains his band of "hand-picked" Oxford backing musicians, including Ride's drummer Loz Colbert, with some super-camp Mick Jagger 'walk-on' moves.

On-stage, Coombes's solo material is mesmerising, from the yearning strains of One Of These Days and 20/20 to the hypnotic, heavy psych of Hot Fruit and The English Ruse. He throws himself into the performance, and leaves the stage after an hour, drenched in sweat and gasping for water. There are after-show drinks and a smoke, before singer and band head off to a nightclub for an end-of-tour celebration.

"I don't try to overthink it," he concludes of his new solo adventures. "I just try to live it and enjoy it. I feel able now to attack the whole thing head on. I want to do something positive and strong." Listen to *Matador*: it's hard to dispute he's doing just that.

Pat Gilbert

SUPERBYE

Gaz Coombes on *Release The Drones*, the final Supergrass album that never was.

"We'd made some great records, and we kept up that high standard on [2008's] *Diamond Hoo Ha*. But then Mick [Quinn, bass] broke his back and we needed to promote the record, so Danny and I became the Diamond Hoo Ha Band. We did The Hot Rats' covers album, which was our *Pin-Ups*. When we went back in the studio as Supergrass [in 2010] I thought we lost sight of something.

We had seven or eight ideas [for *Release The Drones*] and were looking at various new deals. One of the lowest points was when some guys from a label came to Battery Studios in London to hear a playback. We knew it wasn't working, a horrible feeling. They were like, 'We'll be in touch.' I went home feeling really fucking depressed. I talked to my missus about it a lot, and then said to the guys I didn't want to make any more records and that was it.

Looking back, we had so much fun at 17, riding around on choppers, that people struggled with us getting older. Supergrass were forever etched at a certain point. But if you're in your late twenties, ultimately you have to grow up a bit."

JOHNNIE
TAYLOR
Disco Sound '76
Disco Lady
you're the best in the world

TIMEMACHINE

APRIL 1976 ...JOHNNIE TAYLOR WINS THE FIRST PLATINUM SINGLE

APRIL 24 Platinum is one the world's rarest metals, with less than 200 tonnes produced annually. Until 1976 no recording artist could ever boast that he or she had a platinum disc decorating the wall of their main lounge or outhouse. The RIAA, the organisation responsible for awarding such gongs in the USA, introduced the gold record for sales of 500,000 copies in March 1958 and handed the first to crooner Perry Como for his recording of Catch A Falling Star. But in 1976, with the industry expanding, a platinum award for sales of one million copies was instigated.

The first recipient was Dallas-based soul singer Johnnie Taylor, for his recording of Disco Lady. Taylor had been around forever, singing in gospel groups before replacing Sam Cooke in The Soul Stirrers. It had been Cooke, upon whom Taylor had modelled his vocal approach, who'd given the soul man from Arkansas his first stab at secular success with Rome (Wasn't Built In A Day) on Cooke's own SAR label. After Cooke's death in 1964, Taylor switched to Stax, where from 1967 to 1974 he delivered a steady stream of hits until the label foundered in 1975.

Taylor had frequently complained about the material he was handed in the past, first derisively branding Who's Makin' Love, "a boogity, boogity song" until it provided him with his first major success in 1968.

Signed to Columbia in 1976, he continued to denigrate songs offered to him. When Disco Lady was mooted as a single, Taylor told producer Don Davis, "my voice is too low, the record doesn't suit me and I think we need to go with something else."

COLUMBIA
JOHNNIE TAYLOR
EARGASM

Holding court and popping the corks: (clockwise from above left) Johnnie Taylor with a bottle of congratulatory bubbly; backing vocalists Brandy; Bootsy Collins; the 45; Disco Lady's parent LP *Eargasm*.

"IT WAS NOT A DISCO TUNE," PROTESTED TAYLOR.

Certainly the song, composed by Milwaukee singer-songwriter-producer Harvey Scales, wasn't new. Don Davis decided on a revamp in the company of writer Albert Vance, with an added, ace rhythm track. Brought in to play the date were three members of Parliament-Funkadelic, namely bassist Bootsy Collins, keyboardist Bernie Worrell and guitarist Glenn Goins, while also aboard was Dawn vocalist Telma Hopkins and studio group Brandy, leaving David Van DePitte to provide the horn arrangement.

"I got you a smash," Davis informed Taylor.

"You tell me that all the time," countered the singer.

The twosome had been friends for years, Davis recording rhythm tracks at one studio, then sweetening with strings and brass at another before sending them down to Dallas where Taylor would add his vocals. But then Davis heard from Taylor, who complained, "It's a terrible mix. I can't imagine why you want to release it."

It was later discovered that Taylor had been playing his copy on a turntable cued to an incorrect speed.

The single, which appeared on Taylor's debut Columbia album *Eargasm* – he would deny any vulgar connotations in the title, as he would Disco Lady's entreaty to "shake it up, shake it down, move it in, move round" – first hit the black music charts on January 31, 1976. It eventually arrived in the US Top 10 on March 20, climbing to pole position two weeks later. The first Hot 100 record that contained the word 'disco' in its title, the single remained at Number 1 for four weeks. When the record took off it was reported that Columbia executive Bruce Lundvall sent crates of Dom Perignon to Taylor, who drank some and took a bath in what was left.

"A lot of people thought it was disco," mused Taylor. "But it was not a disco tune. We were just *talking* about disco."

However, Taylor's talk sold records, and Disco Lady's sales passed two million and helped *Eargasm* go gold. But the fame achieved by the latter caused problems after Taylor's death from a heart attack in May 2000.

His estate was to have been shared by the six children born into Taylor's two marriages or whom he openly acknowledged as his offspring. It was at this point that three further persons claimed patrimony.

In North Carolina, the Charlotte Observer reported that one claimant, 39-year-old Schiffon Taylor Brown, had never met her father.

"We kept it hush-hush," she said. "My mother was young at the time. I had a birth certificate with his name on it. The first time I saw him was on the Disco Lady [*Eargasm*] album cover. My mom bought the album cover out on the porch and said, 'This is what your dad looks like.'"

Ultimately, the estate was shared between Johnnie Taylor's widow and all nine children.

Fred Dellar

AD ARCHIVE 1976

Henry Cooper and pal Kevin Keegan (right) stockpile Brut deodorant-for-guys. Go on, splash it all over *everything*.

Ace Records, Getty Images (3), Rex, Alamy, Advertising Archives, Mirrorpix

ALSO THIS MONTH

STARTING PISTOLS

3 The **Sex Pistols** (above) play London's Nashville club for the first time. Also on the bill are the 101'ers, whose leader, Joe Strummer, is impressed by the Pistols' attitude.

OCHS CHECKS OUT

9 Protest voice **Phil Ochs** hangs himself at his sister's home in Queens, New York, having suffered problems including bipolar disorder and alcoholism.

HUGE FRAMPTON

10 **Peter Frampton**'s double-album *Frampton Comes Alive* tops the US charts becoming the most successful live LP in rock history. The record was to have been a single until Jerry Moss, Herb Alpert's partner at A&M Records, asked, "Where's the rest?"

WONDER STANDING

14 Motown holds a press conference to inform the world that **Stevie Wonder** has signed a $13 million-plus deal with the label.

BOZ (NOT BOZ)

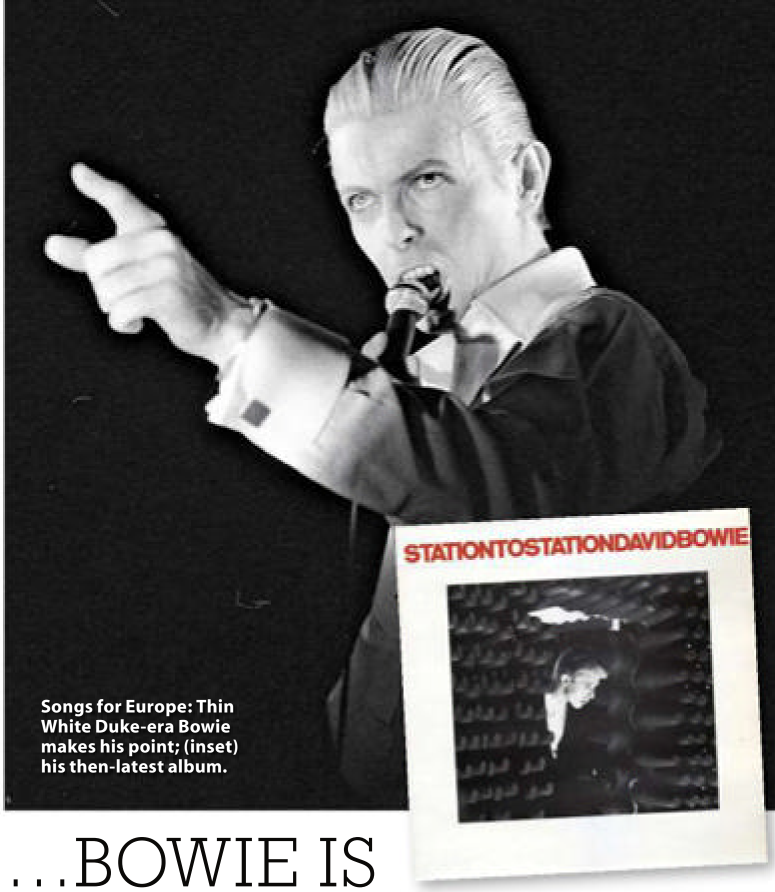
16 **Boz Scaggs** tussles with bouncers at Antone's blues club in Austin, Texas when he tries to go backstage to see **Bobby 'Blue' Bland**.

CARLO KRAHMER DIES

20 British drummer and producer **Carlo Krahmer** dies. A bebop pioneer who launched the Esquire label, the partially-sighted Krahmer, along with **George Shearing**, once formed part of **Claude Bampton's Orchestra**, a band sponsored by the Royal National Institute Of Blind People.

BRUDDAS DIN

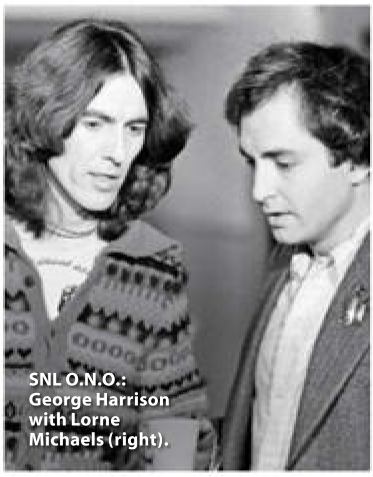
23 The **Ramones**' self-titled debut album is released by Sire. Despite a glut of rave reviews in the music press, it fails to reach the Top 100 – but it will go gold in 2014.



Songs for Europe: Thin White Duke-era Bowie makes his point; (inset) his then-latest album.

…BOWIE IS COMPLETELY CRAZED

APRIL 26 **After a show in Stockholm, David Bowie declares that the UK would benefit from a fascist leader, and says he wants to found his own state. This follows an alleged incident earlier in the month when a train he's travelling on is stopped on the Polish-Russian border, and his collection of Third Reich books – needed, he claims, to research a film about Joseph Goebbels – is confiscated by customs. "The whole Station To Station tour was done under duress," an abashed Bowie tells writer Angus Mackinnon in 1980. "I was out of my mind totally, completely crazed."**


SNL O.N.O.: George Harrison with Lorne Michaels (right).

FABS OFFERED 3 GRAND TO REFORM

APRIL 24 Saturday Night Live producer Lorne Michaels makes an on-air offer to pay The Beatles the paltry sum of $3,000 if they'll reunite live on the show. John Lennon and Paul McCartney, who are watching the show together at Lennon's New York apartment, think about strolling down to the studio and appearing just for "a gag", but after musing it over decide that they are "too tired" to make the effort. The offer will become a running joke on SNL.

TOPTEN

UK SINGLES APRIL 3

1 **SAVE YOUR KISSES FOR ME** BROTHERHOOD OF MAN PYE

2 **YOU SEE THE TROUBLE WITH ME** BARRY WHITE 20TH CENTURY

3 **LOVE REALLY HURTS WITHOUT YOU** BILLY OCEAN GTO

4 **MUSIC** JOHN MILES DECCA

5 **I LOVE TO LOVE (BUT MY BABY LOVES TO DANCE)** TINA CHARLES CBS

6 **I WANNA STAY WITH YOU** GALLAGHER & LYLE A&M

7 **PINBALL WIZARD** ELTON JOHN ROCKET

8 **YESTERDAY** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE

9 **FALLING APART AT THE SEAMS** MARMALADE TARGET

10 **PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND PEOPLE LIKE ME** THE GLITTER BAND BELL

Love and dancing: Tina Charles.

Psalms of Daevid: trickster supreme Allen, on-stage with Gong at Hyde Park, June 29, 1974.

1938-2015

MAGICK BROTHER

Gong father Daevid Allen left us on March 13.

TO SPEND TIME with Daevid Allen was to enjoy a conversation full of discursive ideas and to leave buoyed by the encounter. A hugely energetic and benign presence, the Melbourne-born poet and musician was blessed with a fine sense of mischief and a distinctly libertarian view of the world.

Weaned on a mixture of jazz and Beat poetry, Allen arrived in England in the early '60s and lived in Kent with the Wyatt family, whose teenage son Robert was a keen drummer. The pair first played in the Daevid Allen Trio with bassist Hugh Hopper. In 1966, Allen and Wyatt teamed-up with Kevin Ayers and keyboardist Mike Ratledge to form Soft Machine. Close to five decades on, the band's free jazz-inspired jams remain startling in their arrangements.

Following a set of European dates, Allen's stint in Soft Machine was curtailed when he was refused entry back into the UK in August 1967. Remaining in Paris, he immersed himself in the insurrectionary spirit of the age and participated in the 1968 student protests that swept the city. He also met Gilli Smyth, who became his partner and collaborator; he refining his glissando guitar style and she perfecting her vocal whisper as they sought to create what they dubbed "total space music". The pair later pitched up on Mallorca, where they met flautist Didier Malherbe, who joined them for the debut Gong album *Magick Brother*. Musically, the group drew on Soft Machine's initial fusion of jazz freakery, Beat influences, psychedelia and their early dream-state Parisian jams, but Allen was also fine-tuning a notion he'd received during an out-of-body experience a few years earlier: that the human race was being watched over by a superior intelligence, and that music was the ultimate expression of love. This vision would inspire Gong's mythology on fantastical albums such as 1971's *Camembert Electrique* as well as the Radio Gnome trilogy (*Flying Teapot, Angel's Egg* and *You*).

THE LEGACY

Album: *Camembert Electrique* (BYG Actuel, 1971).

The Sound: Daevid Allen's mixture of free jazz, deep psych and fairy tale whimsy comes into its own on this '71 classic recorded at the legendary 'honky château', Château d'Hérouville. A new version remastered from the original mastertapes was prepared prior to Allen's death, and will now provide a final swansong.

> "A PROVOCATEUR OF THE FIRST ORDER, HE FORGED LINKS BETWEEN HIPPY CULTURE AND PUNK'S NEW INVECTIVE."

Gong's reputation as underground heroes was further cemented by their appearance at the 1971 Glastonbury Festival and their signing to the fledgling, ultra-hip Virgin label. Allen's leadership of the band, however, came to an abrupt halt in 1975 when he said external forces prevented him from going on-stage at a gig in Cheltenham. "It was as though there was an invisible curtain of force that was stopping me from going through the door," he commented years later. "I threw myself at the open door and bounced back off nothing. This blew my mind so thoroughly that I just ran out of the theatre."

But Allen found it impossible to abandon Gong entirely, assembling affiliated acts including Planet Gong (with UK space rockers Here & Now) and New York Gong (with Bill Laswell and future Material members). A provocateur of the first order, he was a link between hippy culture and punk's new invective, re-energising himself and rejoining Gong in the early '90s.

Gong's most recent album, *I See You*, emerged last year and saw Allen tap into contemporary dissent on tracks such as Occupy and This Revolution. Sadly, Allen was unable to tour the album due to treatment for cancer. He remained positive, but the illness returned. Allen released a statement in February, writing, "Thank you for starting the process of letting go of me." After his death, a statement on Gong's website read, "Daevid passed peacefully in Australia today… surrounded by his boys. Everything has stopped here in a house of tears. Tears first, celebration later."

On February 27, Allen gave his last performance at Pizza Paradiso in Suffolk Park, New South Wales, during an evening dedicated to the poetry he and Gilli Smyth had written. His own reading consisted of the final section of Kahlil Gibran's On Death and revealed a man at peace with himself, genial and positive to the very end.

Phil Alexander

Photoshot

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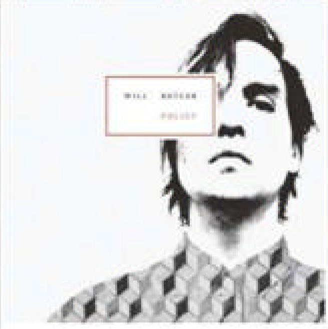
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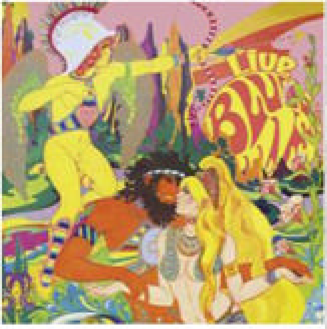
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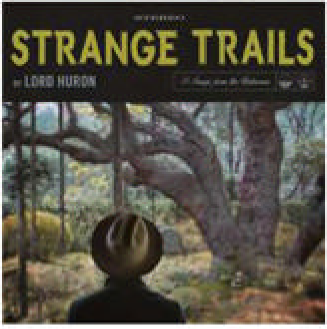
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1959-2015

ONE MAN ON A LONELY PLATFORM

New Romantic prime mover Steve Strange died on February 12.

The long Strange trip: "pleasure junkie" Steve, gloved and loved.

In August 1980, Steve Strange appeared as one of the robed retinue following David Bowie on the solarised, apocalyptic film for his single Ashes To Ashes. As the presiding mastermind of the then-wildly modish Blitz club, Strange had high hopes for his screen debut. Instead, he recalled, "we ended up on a freezing windy beach in Broadstairs performing with a bulldozer." Still, it looked spectacular.

He was born Steven John Harrington in Newbridge, south Wales on May 28, 1959. His parents ran cafes and guests houses, but the marriage did not last. In later life, he said he did not cry when his bullying father John committed suicide. A sensitive child who enjoyed music and fashion and felt he was destined for some kind of recognition, he made it his mission to become Wales's first punk in 1976. A diehard Sex Pistols fan, he befriended the group's bassist Glen Matlock and was soon working in Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's Seditionaries boutique. In early 1977 he toyed with the short-lived Moors Murderers with Chrissie Hynde and Topper Headon, and later ran the Rich Kids' fan club. But it was as elitist face, scenemaker and catalyst within the London club demimonde that he found his calling.

> "HE FOUND HIS CALLING AS ELITIST FACE AND SCENEMAKER IN LONDON'S CLUB DEMI-MONDE."

In September 1978, the man now known as Steve Strange and kindred spirit Rusty Egan started their Bowie night at Billy's club in London's Soho. With Egan as DJ and Strange as stern doorman and never-underdressed grande dame, the club was a laboratory for art school stylistic deviance, and a wild success. Strange carried on holding court at the Blitz club in Covent Garden, where Mick Jagger was once refused entry, and later at the Club For Heroes on Baker Street and the Camden Palace. Denizens included Strange's some-time "hat check girl" Boy George, Spandau Ballet and DJ Jeremy Healy. Strange and Egan had also formed their synth-pop group Visage with Midge Ure of Ultravox and members of Magazine: in late 1980 their single Fade To Grey was a massive hit across Europe, though Strange was not listed in the composers' credits. Visage's self-titled debut and 1982's *The Anvil* would both prove successful, but with Ure departed, 1984's *Beat Boy* peaked at Number 79. The band split the year after; Strange's next project, Strange Cruise, would release one album.

Heroin was part of his life by then, and would remain so sporadically: he later estimated that he spent more than £100,000 on the drug. He went on to run clubs in Ibiza and later returned to live in Porthcawl in Wales, where he was given a suspended sentence for stealing a Tellytubby doll in 2000. He published his memoir Blitzed! in 2002, reformed Visage in 2004 and played himself singing Fade To Grey in the BBC1 series Ashes To Ashes in 2008. Strange and Egan would reunite for a TV show in 2009, and held a 30th anniversary Blitz reunion in London in 2011. A new Visage line up without Egan released *Hearts And Knives* in 2013 and the *Orchestral* LP in 2014.

When Steve Strange died of heart failure in his sleep in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, there was a remarkable outpouring of affection from old comrades including Boy George, who wrote, "Steve was a rogue in many ways. Self-destructive, a pleasure junkie who refused advice and did things his own way but he was loved by those who knew him. I hope his legacy will continue to be celebrated."

Ian Harrison

THE LEGACY

Album: *Visage* (Polydor, 1980)

The Sound: Where Strange and Egan's club soundtrack of Bowie and Kraftwerk was channelled into a winning synth-pop dream of Europa, suitable for parties and posing alike. Includes guitar from John McGeoch and keyboards from his Magazine bandmate Dave Formula: Fade To Grey inspired the Not The Nine O'Clock News TV show's skit Nice Video Shame About The Song.

Camera Press

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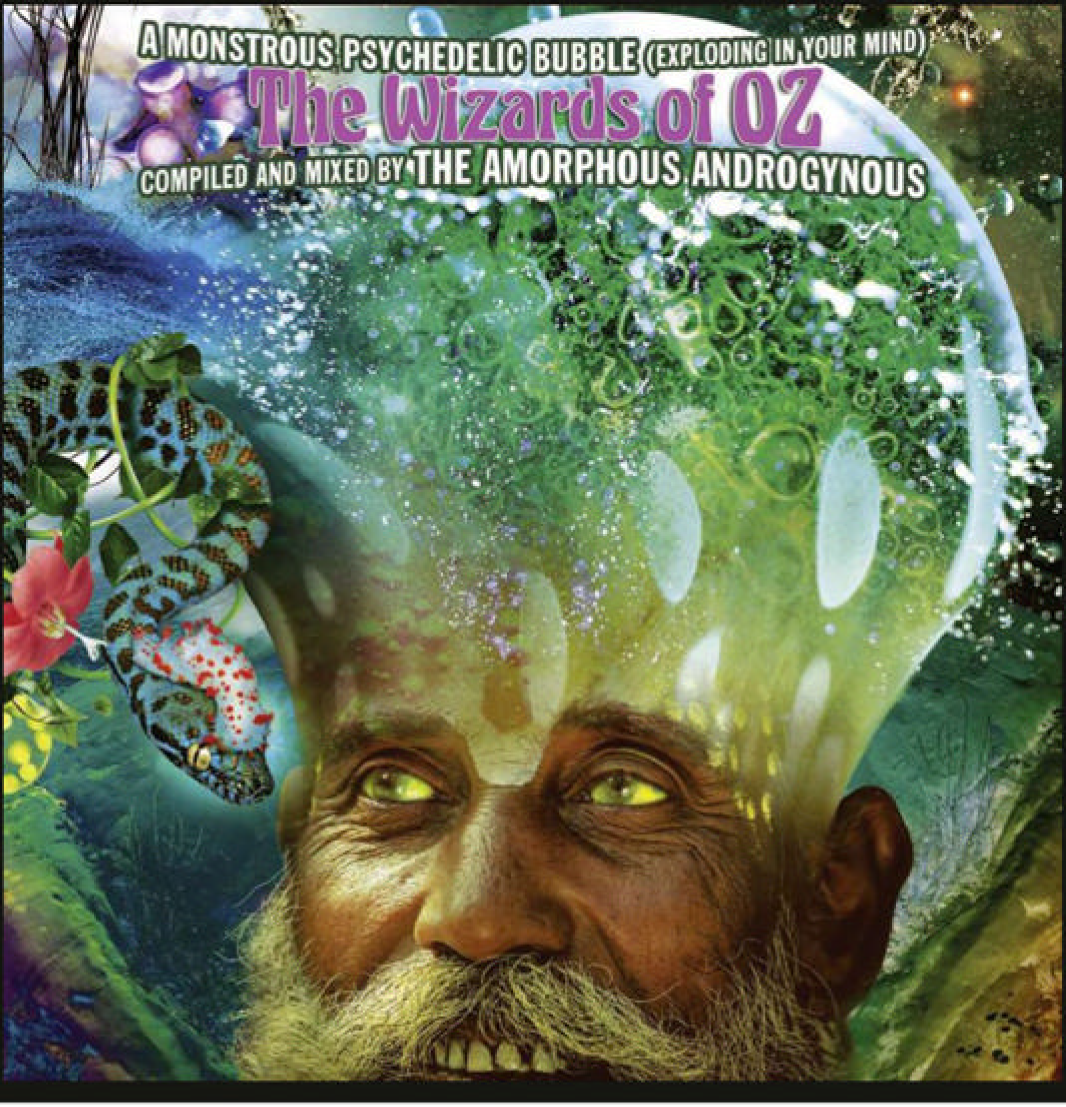
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Lesley Gore: bringer of proto-feminist messages.

LESLEY GORE

VOICE OF IT'S MY PARTY

BORN 1946

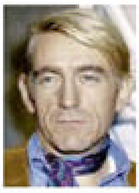
Brooklyn-born Lesley Gore hit US Number 1 and UK Top 10 with her debut 45, It's My Party in 1963. A quintessential piece of girl group melodrama produced by Quincy Jones, its requital follow-up, Judy's Turn To Cry, made the US Top 5 the same year, but it was 1964's US Number 2 You Don't Own Me that the singer identified with most. A proto-feminist message song, authored by Dave White and John Madara, she told this writer in 2011, "That was the song that spoke to me, that was the kind of material I wanted to sing and be remembered for." She revisited it in 2005 on what turned out to be her final album, *Ever Since*, and in 2012 as a part of a drive to encourage women to vote in the US presidential election. Although the hits had dried up by the late '60s, Gore, born Lesley Sue Goldstein, would receive an Oscar nomination for Out Here On My Own, a co-write with her brother Michael on the Fame soundtrack in 1980. She died from lung cancer, aged 68.

Lois Wilson

ROD MCKUEN

THE PEOPLE'S POET

BORN 1933



Ten years ago, writing a Buried Treasure on Frank Sinatra's 1969 LP of Rod McKuen compositions, *A Man Alone*, I e-mailed him. Rod phoned back. He was polite, funny and inquisitive, genuinely pleased to be discussing his work without any sense of apology or qualification. Born in California, at 11 McKuen left his abusive family set-up, working as a ranch hand, railroad worker, lumberjack, rodeo cowboy, stuntman, DJ and journalist before settling in San Francisco where he read poetry with Kerouac and Ginsberg, and, at 16, popularised the beatnik scene on his debut LP, 1959's *Beatsville*. His popular reputation hinges on his English language translations of the songs of his friend, Jacques Brel, and the hundreds of books and albums of music and poetry he released throughout the '60s and '70s. Although regularly dismissed as kitsch, there was often a deep melancholy and vulnerability at the heart of his best work, as well as a romantic elevation of the banal and a blurring of gender identities that predated the work of that other solitary pop poet, Morrissey.

Andrew Male

Rex (2), Getty Images (2)

CLARK TERRY

TRUMPET MAVEN

BORN 1920

An influential and versatile trumpeter whose storied career spanned over 70 years, St. Louis-born Clark Terry began playing professionally in the big band era. He served his musical apprenticeship under the tutelage of jazz aristocrats Count Basie and Duke Ellington before making recordings under his own name in the mid 1950s. An early mentor to a young Miles Davis – "I learned a lot from listening to him play the trumpet," wrote Miles in his autobiography – Terry helped to nurture several generations of juvenile jazz talent during his long life (Quincy Jones, Wynton Marsalis and singer Dianne Reeves were among his star protégés). A pioneer of the flugelhorn in jazz, Terry's distinctive sound appeared on over 900 recordings, including those by jazz greats Dinah Washington, Ella Fitzgerald, Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus. He also enjoyed a parallel career as a jazz educator and was much decorated for his services to the genre, his accolades including a German knighthood and Lifetime Achievement Grammy. Clark Terry, who released his last album in 2005, succumbed to diabetes complications, aged 94.

Charles Waring

THEY ALSO SERVED

FILM-MAKER **ALBERT MAYSLES** (b.1926) taught psychology before forming a documentary partnership with his brother David. Together they produced What's Happening! **The Beatles** In The USA in 1964 and the infamous **Rolling Stones** portrait Gimme Shelter in 1970. Two of the Maysles's works, Salesman and Grey Gardens, are held in the US Library Of Congress's National Film Registry.

SINGER AND SONGWRITER **GAVIN CLARK** (b.circa 1968) sang with **Sunhouse**, **Clayhill** and **UNKLE**: he would also contribute to the soundtracks of films directed by his friend **Shane Meadows**. In 2007 he was the subject of Meadows's short, The Living Room.

SANTA ANA-raised **BRIAN CARMAN** (b.1945) formed instrumental rockers **The Chantays** with friends from high school. In 1962 he co-wrote their evocative, mysterious Number 4 US hit Pipeline, a surf music classic. Although the group only recorded two albums during their heyday, they reformed to play live and record again in the mid '90s.

JAZZ authority and producer **ORRIN KEEPNEWS** (b.1923) edited journal The Record Changer before co-founding the Riverside imprint in 1953 and signing the likes of **Thelonious Monk**, **Bill Evans** and the brothers **Cannonball** and **Nat Adderley**. He later took leading roles at the Milestone, Fantasy and Landmark labels, and won several Grammys for his sleevenotes and reissue curation. His book The View From Within: Jazz Writings, 1948-1987 was published in 1988.

ACTOR **LEONARD NIMOY** (b.1931) found fame as Star Trek's Mr Spock, but also released five albums from 1967 to 1970. The first two, featuring outer space songs and novelty pop, were sung in his Vulcan persona; the rest saw him exploring folk and country, covering songs by **Joni Mitchell**, **John Fogerty** and **Pete Seeger**.

GLASGOW-born singer-songwriter **CHRIS RAINBOW** (b.1946) sang on **The Alan Parsons Project**'s albums 1979-90, and also worked with **Camel**, **Jon Anderson** and **Runrig**. In 1977 he recorded the heartfelt **Brian Wilson** tribute Dear Brian, a song Wilson declared himself, "touched and honoured" by. Another admirer of Rainbow's solo work was **Kenny Everett**.

SINGER **MARLENE BARROW-TATE** (b.circa 1941) was an original member of Motown backing vocal trio **The Andantes**, and lent her soulful voice to hits by **The Four Tops**, **The Temptations**, **Marvin Gaye** and **The Supremes**, who she also sang live with. Though an essential element in the label's signature sound, she did not resent her anonymity.

GUITARIST **SAM ANDREW** (b.1941) co-founded **Big Brother And The Holding Company**. When voice **Janis Joplin** left to go solo, Andrew briefly accompanied her in **The Kozmik Blues Band**. He later composed classical and soundtrack music, reunited with Big Brother, and was musical director of the Joplin stage show Love, Janis in 2001.

NASHVILLE cult and garage rock elder **DAVE CLOUD** (b.1956) formed **The Gospel Of Power** in 1996, a shifting entity that featured members of **Lambchop** and **Silver Jews** among others. He also enjoyed acclaim in Scandinavia, and in 2008 fronted Budweiser beer's UK advertising campaign.

BASSIST **DANNY MCCULLOCH** (b.1945) began his musical life as a young Shepherd's Bush skiffler. He went on to work with **Screaming Lord Sutch & The Savages**, **The Carl Douglas Set** and, from 1967, **Eric Burdon & The Animals**. He later released his solo LPs *Wings Of A Man* and *Beowulf*.

Clive Prior

He did, he did Spock you: the irreplaceable Leonard Nimoy.

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"Betrayed" by The Specials, zealous vicar's son Jerry Dammers battles on, honoured by South Africa, finding solace in Sun Ra. "I loved Teddy Bears' Picnic," he recalls. "Ghost Town isn't a million miles away."

Interview by **LOIS WILSON** • Portrait by **TOM OLDHAM**

MOJO WAS DUE TO MEET JERRY Dammers in a vintage shop in Greenwich, but by the time he arrives it's shuttered and in darkness. As the rain lashes down we make a quick decision to decamp to a friend's nearby flat. Here, a party is in full swing, and instruments are propped up in the hallway: a Höfner bass, an acoustic guitar, a piano that turns out once to have belonged to Otis Spann, Muddy Waters' pianist. "I might have to borrow that off you," Dammers says to the host.

After a few niceties, we find a quiet corner for our conversation. Dammers is immaculately attired as always: a big leather coat hides a checked button-down shirt and selvedge jeans. A Bangladeshi faux-fur hat bought from Brick Lane remains on his head, on his feet, brown and white two tone loafers.

We sip instant coffee out of chipped mugs, and just before the tape player clicks on he says, with a hint of distrust, "I hope you're going to stick to the positive." The suspicion is largely a legacy of his band The Specials' decision to reform without him in 2008, and the subsequent fallout. When MOJO pressures him on the subject, however, he doesn't flinch, answering all questions with the same thoughtful conviction that defines his music-making.

Born in Ootacamund, south India, his father a Church of England official, Dammers went to school in Coventry and later studied art at the city's Lanchester Poly. In 1977 he conceived the Coventry Automatics, who became The Specials, the line-up completed by singer Terry Hall, rhythm guitarist Lynval Golding, lead guitarist Roddy 'Radiation' Byers, toaster Neville Staple, drummer Jon Bradbury, bassist Horace Panter plus a horn section of Rico Rodriguez and Dick Cuthell. Borrowing £700 from a friend, they issued 1979 single Gangsters, a mesh of punk chaos and intensified ska, on their own 2 Tone label. Three albums followed: 1979's self-titled debut, 1980's *More Specials* and 1984's *In The Studio*, the latter with a reconfigured line-up. Musically, they meshed punk, reggae, jazz, soul and exotica; lyrically, they promoted social justice and human rights, most successfully on 1981's prophetic UK Number 1 Ghost Town and 1984's Top 10 Free Nelson Mandela, which raised consciousness about apartheid in South Africa.

Dammers went on to organise the UK branch of Artists Against Apartheid, setting up a series of concerts leading to the Nelson Mandela 70th birthday gig at Wembley Stadium in 1988, which was followed by a second Wembley concert in April 1990 at which Mandela, freed on February 11, spoke. Dammers now splits his time between DJing, producing and helming the Jerry Dammers Spatial AKA Orchestra.

What are your first musical memories?

My parents had an old wind-up 78 and I loved ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Suggs on the ska revival's *primus inter pares.*

Paul Rider

"Jerry was kipping on the sofa, in my mum's flat, after a gig at the Hope & Anchor pub when he announced he was going to start his own label. 'It's gonna be called 2 Tone,' he said. 'What, after your teeth, Jerry?' I replied. Jerry gave Madness our first chance and remains a musical visionary."

Teddy Bears' Picnic. I still love it. It's really spooky, scary, with a fantastic arrangement. Ghost Town isn't a million miles away.

Was there a pivotal moment that made you think – I want to do this?

I loved The Who and Small Faces and I wanted to be Keith Moon. I saw The Who at the Coventry Theatre. They had a curfew and the curtains closed before they could smash up their instruments. Pete Townshend was trying to hold the curtains open with one hand, and smash his guitar with the other, and he got all tangled up in the curtain.

Prince Buster was an early influence. How did you discover ska and reggae?

I remember a friend of my brother's coming round the house and bringing a record that sounded nothing like any record I'd heard. I think it was Prince Buster's Al Capone. A few years later, I got *Reggae Chartbusters* and Dandy's Reggae In Your Jeggae was the first reggae I tried to play on the piano. But it was really hard to get roots reggae in Coventry, apart from the obvious ones on Virgin or Island. The Jamaican community in Coventry wasn't that big, but there was an old white grandma who lived on the Foleshill Road – she sold a few from her living room. I used to buy these earth-shattering records like One Step Forward by Max Romeo and Sister Maggie Breast by I Roy from her.

Is it true that you asked John Lydon to front The Specials?

Yes, Roadent [Sex Pistols roadie] was a friend of Roddy's and mine from Coventry. He introduced me to both John Lydon and The Clash. In my mind, the plot was always supposed to go Sex Pistols – Clash – Jam – The Specials. My mother always said there's no point in doing anything unless you're going to do it properly! I even chose the name Specials partly because it sounded reggaeish, but partly because it sounded like saying, "Sex Pistols" when you're pissed. Mr Rotten was very polite, though, and said he was working on a new band.

What attracted you to Terry Hall?

He looked striking in his leather jacket and did a good Pete Shelley-meets-Johnny Rotten. Terry came into his own in the studio when we did the first album because for the first time he could sing quietly on songs like Doesn't Make It Alright, the dub of Too Much Too Young and You're Wondering Now. That brought out the melancholy in the songs, which was always supposed to be there, but hadn't surfaced in the noise of the live gigs.

You wrote Gangsters on Joe Strummer's guitar while supporting The Clash on their On Parole tour. Was Joe a role model?

Previous attempts at white reggae had been lame. The Clash version was more credible, not because they tried to make it sound like real reggae, but because they took it seriously and took on board the political and protest element of reggae. So yes, The Clash was a big influence, plus they gave us our first big break. I met [Clash manager] Bernie Rhodes through Roadent and talked him into giving us one date on The Clash tour. He hadn't heard us, but I told him we were a racially mixed punk reggae band, and he didn't believe it was possible, so he gave us a gig just to see. The Clash liked us enough to offer us the whole tour, but Bernie only paid us £30 a night. We ran out of money and some of us had to sleep in a tent.

You once said your aim with The Specials was nothing short of revolution.

I spent my time growing up in Coventry in the '60s and '70s seeing the working-class youth bashing each other up, whether it was bashing immigrants or bashing each other at football. It was only a minority, of course, but it did seem like most districts in Coventry had some sort of gang, and some of the pubs were notorious for people glassing each other. The media was winding this up all over the country, so some kids thought that was what they were supposed to do. Meanwhile, the establishment that was actually keeping them down just carried on getting richer like they always had. The hippies wanted to form a better "alternative" society, but that just alienated some people. I wanted to change *all* of society from within, which was a much harder and more risky thing to try and do. The amazing thing is that it worked at all, even to the small extent that some people say it did. I often meet people who tell me that if it wasn't for The Specials they would have been racists or whatever, and that they turned to more socialist ideas because of The Specials.

What initially sent you down the left-wards path politically?

Well hopefully that was some sort of intelligence or common sense. The general idea that children still starving, or dying of preventable diseases, or getting blown to pieces, is not a good thing. Even if there was such a thing as "trickle down" from capitalism, which there never has been, and never will be, what an absolutely horrible idea, that some people are only worthy of what might happen to "trickle down" from the rich.

How did you end up with Elvis Costello producing The Specials' debut album? And what did you learn from him?

I think he was suggested by Rick Rogers, our manager. I learnt about professionalism. Elvis is an incredibly professional musician. It's not surprising he has survived way beyond any of his peers from the "punk" generation. The problem with the punk thing was that it was a fantastic statement having people who could only just sing, or play three chords, but in the long run where could anyone take it? The

A LIFE IN PICTURES 2

Jerry's journal: publish and be Dammers.

1 Jerry Dammers, this is your lunch, 1973: "I wanted to be Keith Moon."

2 Baby steps with Nite Train in 1975 with (far right) Ray King and (on guitar) Neol Davies, later of The Selecter.

3 The first Specials: (clockwise, from top left) Horace Panter, Dammers, Lynval Golding, John Bradbury, Terry Hall, Roddy Byers, Neville Staple, 1980.

4 The Special AKA in 1984: (from left) Stan Campbell, John Shipley, Dammers, Gary McManus, Panter, Rhoda Dakar.

5 Dammers as the alien visitor from the video for What I Like Most About You Is Your Girlfriend, 1984.

6 At the Wembley concert celebrating Nelson Mandela's emancipation, April 16, 1990: "The proudest moments of my life."

7 Mobilising Red Wedge with Billy Bragg and Paul Weller, 1987: "Any attempt to get rid of the Tories was better than nothing."

8 Fronting the Spatial AKA Orchestra on Later… With Jools Holland, April 2010.

9 In December, 1984, just before the recording pause: "I was being pressured by everyone."

2

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©Jerry Dammers (2), Photoshot, Getty Images (2), Alamy, Rex, Tom Sheehan (2)

Specials was halfway between punk and the music that went before.

Which in itself was radical. Then, on *More Specials*, you introduced exotica and easy listening a full decade and a half before its '90s revival.

Like I said, I wanted to progress things and not get stuck playing the first album for the rest of our lives. For years "lift music" had been regarded in rock circles as the ultimate in bad music. So when we got to America I finally got to hear this supposedly awful "lift music" in the lifts of the hotels, and it was fantastic! Some of the hotels still had trios playing this weird stuff in the lobby and I thought, "That's it. That's a new sound and direction."

This "new sound and direction" caused friction in the band, though.

On the second album some of the chords were a little bit more complicated. If you suggest trying stuff which is easy to play, no problem, but if you suggest something a bit more difficult, or something no musician has tried before, suddenly you're accused of "dictating" – funny that, isn't it? So instead of letting me explain what the chord structures were, Roddy preferred to jam along and work something out himself, most of which sounded great, but it did mean that we had to start recording him separately as an overdub… On International Jet Set he just would not cooperate, so I ended up having to play the lead sitar guitar myself. It was sad. If I could play it on keyboards and Lynval could play it, there was nothing too difficult for Roddy, but he just didn't want to find out how the chords went.

Then it all came to a head on the Ghost Town sessions.

Ghost Town contained the dreaded diminished chord, the so-called devil's chord, which you could supposedly get hung for playing in the Middle Ages. It had never been used in reggae as far as I know. Roddy was great, except when some of his Chuck Berry licks started wrestling with that devil's chord. He got more and more frustrated and was smashing holes in the wall between the control room and the studio with his fist, but no way was he going to let me show him the notes in the chord. There was nothing I could do. He had already smashed his guitar over my keyboards on-stage without a word of explanation, and had become abusive towards me most of the time. I said to everyone, "This can't go on," but instead of backing me up Fun Boy Three walked away. The best bits Roddy did were fantastic and all the song needed, so producer John Collins just used them.

"[The Specials] are like the **Sealed Knot Society** re-enacting a **Civil War** battle."

Terry, Lynval and Neville left just after Ghost Town, which is widely acknowledged as The Specials' finest moment. What do you remember of writing it?

I can remember feeling guilty about writing a song in Jamaican patois. I don't think many white people had done that at the time, but it's actually a very poetic language and great to write in. Sadly, Neville was also being uncooperative by that time. I can remember going round his house and suggesting the lyrics to him so gently and diplomatically it was absurd, but I knew I had a good song, and it needed to be made.

Do you see it as your finest moment?

I think it's probably my favourite moment from The Specials, musically speaking, but I think Free Nelson Mandela had far more actual positive effect globally, probably more than everything the first Specials line-up did. The song became an anti-apartheid anthem around the world – they even played it at anti-apartheid rallies inside South Africa – and the song led directly to the Mandela 70th birthday concert at Wembley Stadium, which was televised to millions around the world.

Did Terry, Lynval and Neville leaving feel like a betrayal?

No offence, but I hate it when journalists say, "Did it feel like a betrayal?" It *was* a betrayal obviously! Not just to me, but to everyone else in the band who had worked so hard to get us where we were, including Rico and Dick. It was also a betrayal of a huge number of people for whom, whether we liked it or not, we had become some sort of spokesmen. Ultimately, I think they betrayed themselves, too, and I think deep down maybe they know it. Now they've gone and re-enacted more or less the same thing all over again.

With the current reunion?

Again, sorry, but people don't understand how it feels to me when they refer to that as a "reunion", like I don't exist, and especially as my contribution to the real Specials was so central. It's never been a "reunion". To me, what they've done sometimes seems to have been more like the Sealed Knot Society re-enacting a Civil War battle.

Did you want a reunion?

It was my idea in the first place, but the ➢

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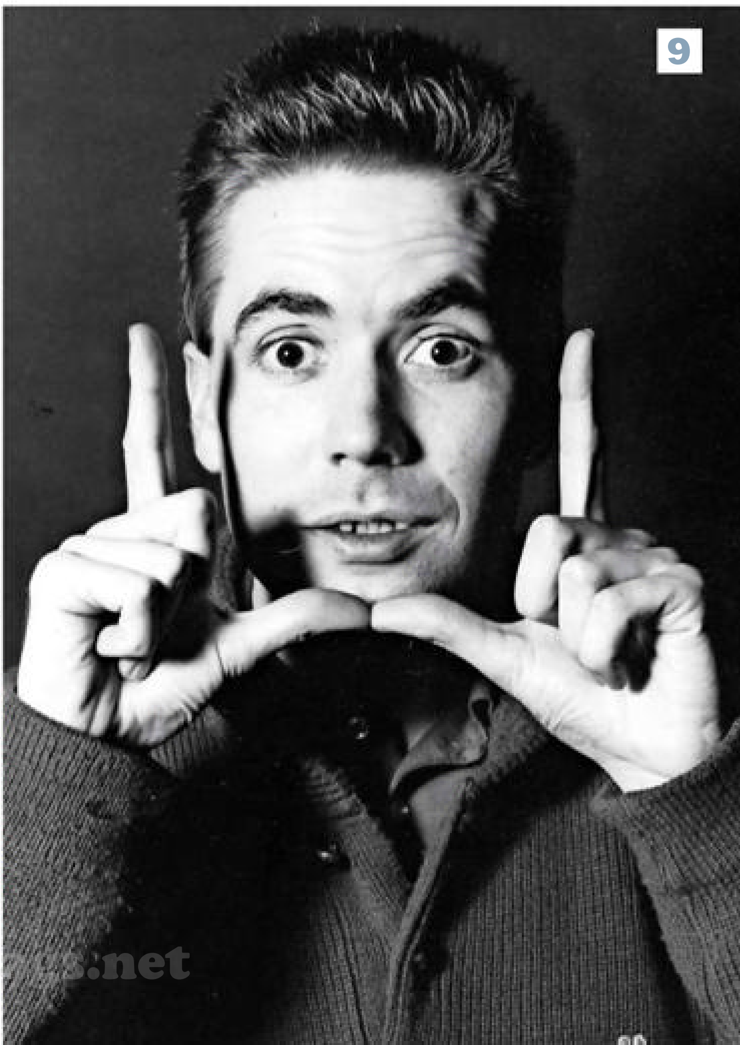
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Seeking 7-inch inspiration in Brixton, February 10, 2015: “It was hard to get roots reggae in Coventry.”

“If you **suggest something** a bit **more difficult**, suddenly you’re accused of **‘dictating’**.”

word “reunion” implies some sort of short-lived nostalgia knees-up. I wanted to get the real Specials back together, with some safeguards in place to try and prevent the same destructive things happening again, and with a commitment to fair treatment of all the people who had created the huge value of the name, including Rico and Dick. I had dreamed of it for 20 years, and was under the illusion that they might come back one day, having come to appreciate what I had contributed. It was horrible to find out they’d actually come together with the intention of kicking me out.

How did you envisage it happening?

I had wanted us to get back together for the same reason I thought we got together in the first place, to try and play and make decent music together. I saw a documentary about Graham Parker And The Rumour and the difference in attitude was unbelievable. It made me sad, because the *first* thing that band wanted to do was try and make a new album together, it was really touching. I didn’t expect to do that straight away. I just wanted to rehearse a bit and try to do the old songs really well, and I had a couple of ideas for possible new material that I wanted to at least *try*. That wasn’t necessarily a condition, I just wanted to find out what we could do, but they just wouldn’t give me a chance.

So what do you remember of that first rehearsal?

I wouldn’t say it ever got as far as a proper “rehearsal”. At no point were all seven members in the room at the same time, and at the second and only other attempt, Lynval, Neville and Brad weren’t even there. After that, they cut me off from all communication. They weren’t interested in trying to work up the old stuff to try and make it really good, or in doing most of the second album, and they weren’t interested in trying any new material, or in trying to sort out any of the old problems, which were obviously still there. Horace came marching over with a setlist, mostly from the first album, and stuck it on my keyboards. Roddy was staring at me, chewing gum, and trying to look threatening, just like he looked before he smashed his guitar over my keyboards 20 years before. How is anyone supposed to play music in that atmosphere? Looking back, I try and cheer myself up by trying to see a funny side. It did remind me of that Ealing comedy The Ladykillers. You know, where the gang shuffle in carrying instruments, looking shifty and pretending to be musicians, when really they’re after the loot.

What did Terry think of it all?

I think it was fairly obvious Terry didn’t want to get into any serious rehearsing or trying new material, because he saw it as a short-term thing, which was going to help relaunch his solo career. He confirmed that a couple of years ago, when he said they’d done what they were going to do, and he had booked the studio for his next solo album. Horace has since confirmed in print that they didn’t even want to invite me to the first meeting, and Neville has confirmed that Terry, Horace and Lynval didn’t want me in it. They have confirmed it all in print now, end of story.

Can there be reconciliation?

Normally reconciliation is between people who have done bad things to each other. Just like when they first left The Specials, they always try and paint things as if there was some sort of two-way “acrimony”, without ever explaining what it is I am supposed to have done bad to them. So I’m not sure if “reconciliation” is the appropriate word. I haven’t spent any more time thinking about what might have been good for The Specials. I’ve had the honour to work with some brilliant musicians

and singers who have seemed willing to listen to my ideas, including Johnny Clarke, Cornell Campbell and the very sadly recently deceased Stephen Gordon, aka The Spaceape. I do believe in reconciliation but reconciliation can take many forms. Any kind of reconciliation has to be based on truth and fairness, which in this case would mean proper appreciation and recognition of *all* the people who created The Specials' name, and that includes Rico, Dick and me. So far, sadly, there is no sign that they have any understanding of, or interest in that concept, but I never give up hope that a change might come. If any of them read this, I would urge them to please think, before just launching into another round of stuff that isn't true.

So with the current reissue of the Specials and Special AKA back catalogue, was it difficult looking back?

I haven't looked back until this interview! The Specials and all good bands are much more than the people in them, and the music on the records still sounds the same as it ever did. What went on behind the scenes is irrelevant, apart from the question of whether there could have been more music.

The "more music" came with a new Specials line-up. What was the thinking behind releasing The Boiler, one of the most unsettling singles of the '80s?

I thought it was an important statement which needed to be recorded and out there. When it was released Elvis Costello rang me up and congratulated me for doing the right thing, which was nice, because it was hard knowing it wasn't commercial, while the Fun Boy Three were up there doing their poppy thing.

Tom Oldham

***In The Studio*'s overriding theme is of imprisonment. But recording it seemed to become a prison in itself.**

I was under pressure to work on everyone's ideas for backing tracks. I had to get ideas for songs and graft them onto those backing tracks, then I had to form a band to rival the original line-up, Horace having scarpered like the proverbial rat off a sinking ship. We were encouraged into one of the most expensive studios in London [AIR] by the record company [2 Tone's parent label Chrysalis]… and guess what? They owned the studio! So it was just a book-keeping exercise to them, which we would have to eventually pay for. I was being so pressured by everyone. I admit it was hard to keep track of what was going on, and as the bills mounted the pressure mounted for something resembling a hit to at least try and rescue it all. I had to bring Elvis [Costello] back to produce Free Nelson Mandela before the whole thing fell apart. It also needs to be said that the whole album probably didn't approach half the cost of one Duran Duran video at the time.

JERRYBUILT

Dammers' five most significant songs, by Pat Gilbert.

SKA GOES PUNK!

Too Much Too Young

(FROM THE SPECIAL AKA LIVE! EP, 1980)

TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG
THE SPECIAL AKA LIVE!

Just as Jamaica recycled its musical output to create new forms, so The Specials adapted vintage ska/reggae tracks for their own ends. Here, Dammers soups up Lloyd Charmers' risqué Birth Control with a new, satirical lyric about teenage girls falling pregnant in the UK welfare state. Playful, funny, razor-sharp.

TRAGIC MAGIC!

Pearl's Cafe

(FROM *MORE SPECIALS*, 1980)

MORE SPECIALS

Dammers didn't only do socio-political; he could do touching, kitchen-sink personal, too. Starting life as 'Rock'n'Roll Nightmare', this loping mix of Kingston, JA meets New Orleans via the Midlands has a joyously dour, rinky-dink feel, as it charts a one-time beauty's descent into alcoholism. "Bollocks to it all," she sang. Indeed!

THE ZOMBIE ANTHEM!

Ghost Town

(SINGLE, 1981)

THE SPECIALS

Britain's inner cities were aflame, as the institutionalised racism The Specials by their very nature challenged erupted into civil disquiet. The soundtrack? Dammers' eerie, carnivalesque, doom-reggae song, vainly hankering for better times. One of the greatest-ever UK Number 1s.

THE CREEPY MAMBO!

What I Like Most About You Is Your Girlfriend

(FROM *IN THE STUDIO*, 1984)

Dammers had explored a lounge/exotica dimension on *More Specials*, but with the gang now split, his impulse to make strange, haunting, genre-upending music really took flight. This woozy, falsetto-voiced, jazz-reggae corker captured perfectly the confused lows of intoxicated self-loathing.

THE WORLD-CHANGER!

Nelson Mandela

(SINGLE, 1984)

THE SPECIAL AKA

Very few records can claim directly to influence global politics, and perhaps this didn't either, but it certainly helped to focus the attention of the post-punk generation on the ANC leader's plight, while also becoming anti-apartheid's easy-access musical totem. Lively, liberating, timeless.

Last year you received one of South Africa's highest national honours, the Grand Companion Of O.R. Tambo, for your role in the anti-apartheid movement. Was that a proud moment?

It was really great that the South African government remember what I did, because after Free Nelson Mandela was a hit, Dali Tambo, the son of [exiled president of the ANC] Oliver Tambo, approached me to organise Artists Against Apartheid and I spent four years working unpaid in an office organising bigger and bigger concerts with The Smiths, Madness, New Order, Billy Bragg and others. Those culminated in by far the proudest moments of my life: the anti-apartheid concert on Clapham Common, which attracted 200,000 people. I put the bill together: Gil Scott-Heron, Hugh Masekela, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Paul Weller, Sade, Big Audio Dynamite… It was the largest anti-apartheid demonstration to have taken place anywhere in the world at the time. Then I secured the commitment of Simple Minds to play for Artists Against Apartheid at Wembley Stadium, Dire Straits agreed, and that was the foundation on which the Mandela 70th birthday concert was built. Playing Free Nelson Mandela to a global audience, and again at the second Wembley concert, when Mandela himself spoke after his release… those experiences put my experiences in the original Specials line-up into perspective.

Did any good come out of Red Wedge?

Well Nelson Mandela said that any *attempt* to get rid of apartheid was welcome. Red Wedge obviously didn't succeed because the Tories got back in power in that election, but to me, any *attempt* to get rid of the Tories was better than doing nothing. Even if you fail, you still hopefully learn something for the next attempt.

And now you're currently helming the Spatial AKA Orchestra, which started life as a tribute to Sun Ra.

The Orchestra has moved on quite a lot. We still do some Sun Ra tunes, but with reggae, ska, jazz, library music and some original tunes, old and new. Some of it was supposed to be what Sun Ra might have done if he was doing a Jerry Dammers tribute band! (*laughs*) At our recent show at the Barbican, we showed these amazing paintings by George Shaw, of the council estate he grew up on in Coventry… Harry Brown played Alice Coltrane's Going Home high up on his trombone – it's the same tune as Dvorák's New World Symphony, which Alice Coltrane claimed is based on an old slaves' spiritual. It was very powerful, and I've been told some people were in tears. The response overall has been fantastic. One guy said he'd been going to Glastonbury for 30 years and the orchestra was the best thing he'd ever seen there. It's little things like that that keep me going. Ⓜ

Special Editions of the three albums – Specials, More Specials and In The Studio – are available now on 2 Tone/Warners.

THE ALCHEMIST

In the 20 years since the end of *DIRE STRAITS*, *MARK KNOPFLER* has quietly transformed himself from reluctant stadium rocker into a great British songwriter with a loyal and faithful following. In the wake of a new album, *Tracker*, *ANDREW MALE* talks to the singer and guitarist about his songs, his life and all manner of detours in between.

Portrait by *TOM SHEEHAN*

IN A WOOD-LINED ANTEROOM ON the first floor of Mark Knopfler's British Grove Studios, two straight-back Italian chairs in brown bonded leather have been placed opposite each other, some three feet apart. Next to the chairs are two wooden occasional tables, each a holding a small bottle of still mineral water. Arranged behind the two chairs is an artful semi-circle of four signature Knopfler guitars, a hollow body Gibson, a red 1961 Fender Stratocaster, a Frost Blue Pensa MKD and a custom-built archtop MonTeLeone.

"Mark likes to have his guitars at hand," explains his manager. While MOJO waits for Knopfler there's time to study the huge painting that hangs on the wall of the nearby landing, Four Lambrettas And Three Portraits Of Janet Churchman, by the British post-war "kitchen sink" expressionist John Bratby.

A detail of the painting features on the cover of Knopfler's 2007 solo album, *Kill To Get Crimson*, while Bratby has been a recurring lyrical reference across a 20-year solo career that has seen Knopfler's songwriting gradually transform from the steel-eyed observational sketches he wrote with Dire Straits to something more hushed, nuanced and interior, compassionate character portraits of drifters, grafters and forgotten art-world habitués that, with his new album, *Tracker*, has reached a new quiet peak.

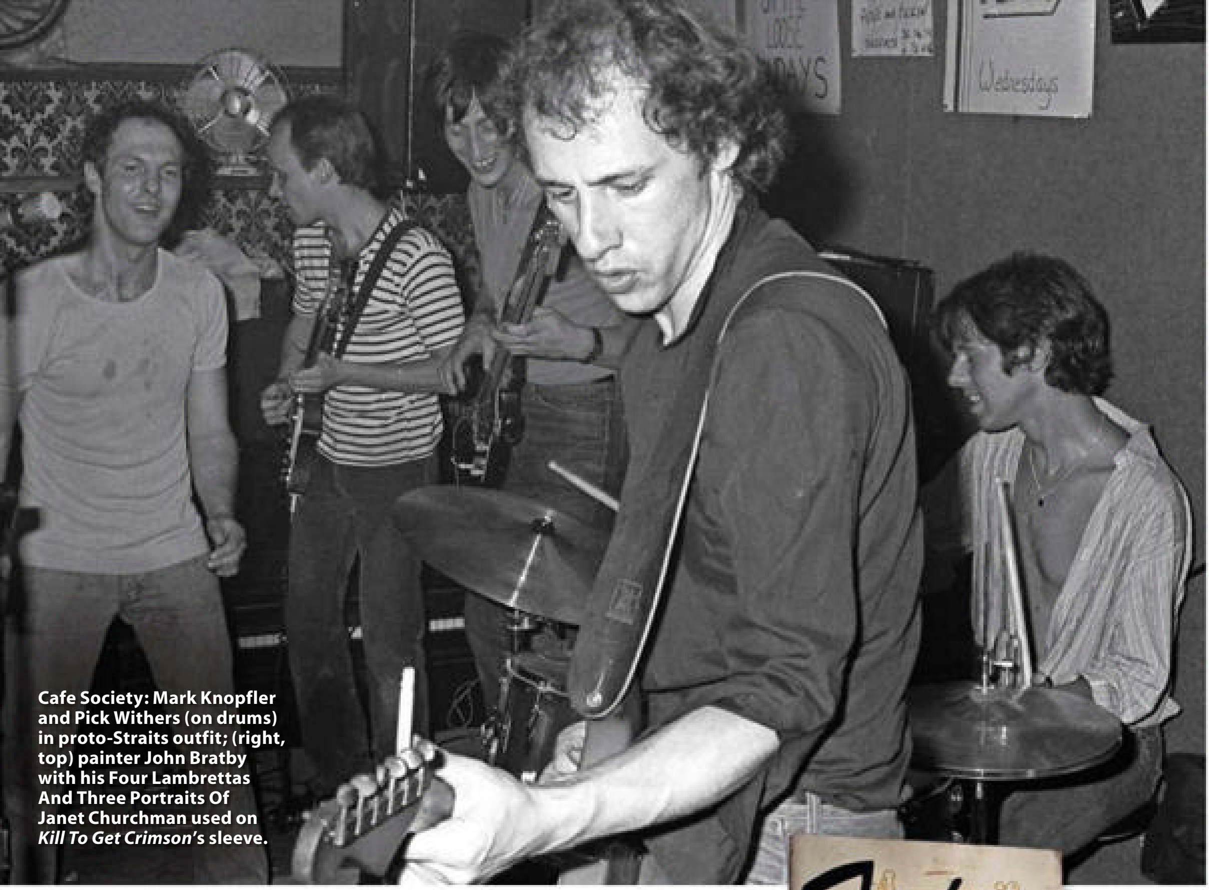
"Oh, no! What are all these guitars doing here?"

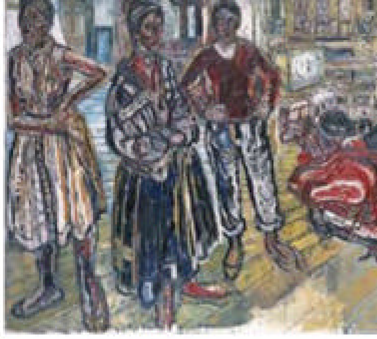
Mark Knopfler has arrived. The tone is more bemused than angry, incredulous that anyone would think there should be *guitars* here. "It looks like a guitar showroom," he continues. "Let's have these moved. And these chairs. We can't sit in these chairs. Looks like a job interview. Do you like these chairs? They're like the chairs I bought when I first moved to London. When I was putting the studio together I was really pleased that they were still making them."

He points at a brown leather Magistretti sofa at the back of the room. "I also had a sofa like that except it was very dark blue with a tawny stripe. And it was dead cool and what you can do with this is…" He adjusts the wire-framed headrest. "What designers these Italians are…" and we are talking about Italian furniture.

In the world of magic they call it misdirection, the ability to focus your audience's attention on one thing in order to distract attention from another. When I first interviewed Knopfler, back in 2006, it was in a London hotel room with Emmylou Harris. She talked about the album they had just recorded together, the gently ➢

"Forensic and involved": Mark Knopfler trains his artist's eye on MOJO's Tom Sheehan, West London, January 2015.


Cafe Society: Mark Knopfler and Pick Withers (on drums) in proto-Straits outfit; (right, top) painter John Bratby with his Four Lambrettas And Three Portraits Of Janet Churchman used on *Kill To Get Crimson*'s sleeve.



⪡ bittersweet *All The Roadrunning*, while Knopfler spent the first 20 minutes fiddling with the hotel room air-conditioning. Every question addressed to Emmylou was answered directly. Every question addressed to Mark span off at a gnomic tangent.

Today Knopfler strays from the point with a relaxed effortlessness. He speaks with a light North-eastern accent shot through with a weighty seriousness and can gear-change smoothly from dry specifics to a rewarding evasiveness and a more impressive filibustering in which answers to specific questions about Dire Straits or his working relationship with Bob Dylan become general ruminations on the pleasures of touring, recording or playing live.

This all works to conceal significant details about the real Mark Knopfler. Which, of course, in the process, reveals a great deal about the real Mark Knopfler.

When he first hit big with Dire Straits, after the 1979 re-release of their debut single, Sultans Of Swing, Knopfler was 29 years old, musical identity already hard-wired. As a result, he's always seemed like someone who's been able to shape environments to suit him, rather than be shaped by the fashions and temptations of the time.

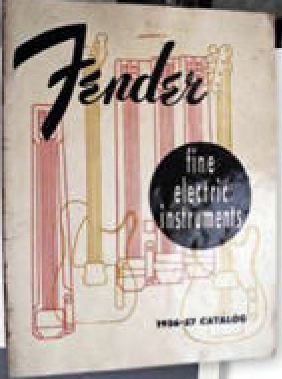
"I was just very lucky," agrees Knopfler, "in the sense that success came late. Still overwhelming, still no doubt damaging but that first album came out when I was 28. If I'd been 18… It's hard to think of anyone who was deified as a teenager who has survived intact."

He pauses, as if to think of someone.

"There's a huge, huge amount of damage that goes with that."

MOJO asks how close Knopfler came to being damaged.

"Shredded," he corrects. "Shredded."



SULTANS OF SWING
DIRE STRAITS

Knopfler inspirations: (from top)Fender catalogue and Chuck Berry; Dire Straits' breakthrough 45.

Rex (3), Corbis, Getty Images, Alamy

BORN IN GLASGOW IN 1949 TO A GEORDIE MOTHER and a Hungarian emigré father, Mark Knopfler seems to have always been a listener and an observer, ingrained with an early love of music and an obsession with electric guitars thanks to the influence of Lonnie Donegan, Hank Marvin and his uncle Kingsley, who taught him harmonica and boogie-woogie piano. When Knopfler was seven the family moved to his mother's home town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

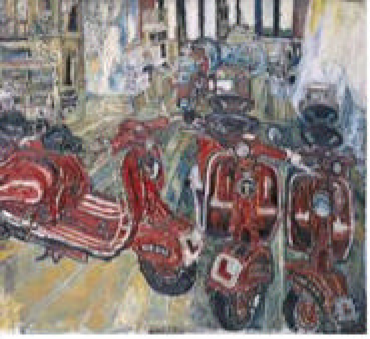
Nose forever in a Fender guitar catalogue ("I knew what it smelt like, what the grain of paper was like") he was "always in trouble at school" for making twanging noises at the back of the class. The sound that defines the best Knopfler songs – rockabilly pop laments with a haunting Celtic undertow – was in the mix right from the start.

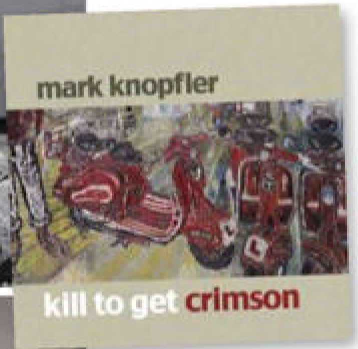
"I was a massive Ricky Nelson fan," he says. "He had that melancholy thing in his voice. The Evs, Buddy Holly… [but] the first music I will have heard will have been Jimmy Shand. It goes right back to Scottish country dance music. Uncle Kingsley used to wear a kilt and ask to play his bagpipes."

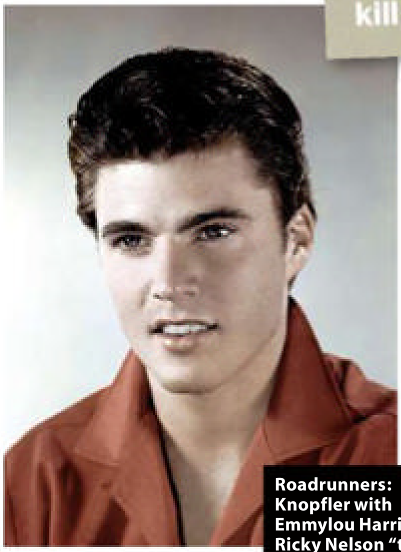
Kingsley's older brother Freddie was a piper in the 1st Battalion Tyneside Scottish, the Black Watch, Royal Highland Regiment. He carried his pipes into action and was killed with them at Ficheux, near Arras, in May 1940, aged 20. "The pipes always made sense to me," says Knopfler.

The first two songs on Knopfler's new album deal specifically with that distant remembered time, before the world changed. The shimmering, dreamlike Basil tells of Knopfler's time as a teenage copyboy on the Newcastle Evening Chronicle in the mid '60s, quietly observing the crotchety comings and goings of the financial sub-editor, the British modernist poet Basil Bunting.

"I started there at 14," explains Knopfler, "but I was 15 when I started asking about him. He was a man out of time, very interested in time. As well as a meditation on time, [Bunting's epic poem] Briggflatts was an exploration of young love wasted. I had no clue he was part of any of that. When you're 15 you're so full of yourself and your future. Of course, now I sort of find myself far more in sympathy with Basil."







Roadrunners: Knopfler with Emmylou Harris; Ricky Nelson "that melancholy thing".

It was also around this time that Knopfler saw Chuck Berry play Newcastle City Hall, a far more enticing vision of an adult future than the grouchy duffle-coated Bunting. Knopfler started playing in local beat groups and hitching down to London to watch bands. Aged 16, he formed a folk duo with his school friend, Sue Hercombe, earning them a spot on the BBC regional evening news slot, Look North.

After studying journalism at Harlow College, Knopfler worked as a junior reporter on the Yorkshire Evening Post and completed an English degree at Leeds University, before moving to London to briefly play guitar with the pub rockers Brewers Droop, featuring future Dire Straits drummer Pick Withers. Lecturing by day at Loughton College in Essex, Knopfler spent his evenings playing with Withers in a band called the Café Racers. With the arrival of Knopfler's brother David and his flatmate, Leicester-born bassist John Illsley, the Café Racers became Dire Straits. The opening number on *Tracker*, Laughs And Jokes And Drinks And Smokes details the fragmented memories of the people and places from that time, before Dire Straits became big business.

"That song is about all of us," explains Knopfler. "All of those times, not just that time, all the times rolled together. It's just, Where are they now? You can be in these flats and it's a temporary kind of lifestyle. There are some specifics in the sense that you can track songs to certain event…"

The sentence unravels as it unfolds, gradually transforming into a pleasantly circuitous disquisition on bohemian lives, the novelist Joyce Cary, the British abstract artist Roger Hilton and the Liverpool novelist Beryl Bainbridge who forms the subject of another of *Tracker*'s stand-out compositions, the wryly rockin' Beryl.

"It was a different world when Beryl was writing," explains Knopfler. "There was a real Oxbridge prejudice towards her. She was a self-deprecating working-class Liverpool girl who never went to university, with a publisher who didn't set much store by her novels. For some perverse reason, that seemed to suit Beryl. I suppose what I'm rambling loosely about is the desire, the obsession. You've got to be somewhat obsessed. Hilton, Cary, Bratby, these figures flit in and out of my songs. I've always found it attractive, the demi-monde, people who are living a different kind of a life but just as I've always been attracted to ordinary people who graft, you know."

Knopfler knocks back any suggestion that there might be anything to read into his interest in quietly grafting artists who exist outside of mainstream acceptance. Rather, it stems from the fact that he grew up without a religious education ("Yeah, my father was a confirmed atheist") but with a devout work ethic.

"Oh yeah. I think that's true," he says. "That Northern idea of 'That's not work!' I think man must work. I absolutely believe that."

THIS NORTHERN WORK ETHIC WAS ONE OF THE key reasons behind the astonishing success of Dire Straits; Knopfler's decision to take a burned-out band off the road at the start of 1980 – following the lacklustre reception for their second studio album, *Communiqué* – and retreat to the Power Station in New York. Taking the reins, Knopfler drilled the band to become tighter musicians, using the studio as an instrument to transform Dire Straits into the quintessential '80s album band, just in time for the affordable hi-fi boom and the arrival of the ➢

The Atkins diet: Mark and Chet in 1990.

THE WORK OF LIFE

Band, solo, soundtracks, collaborations: the best of *MARK KNOPFLER*. By *ANDREW MALE*.

BAND

DIRE STRAITS

Love Over Gold

(Vertigo, 1982)

★★★★★

Building on the "making movies" refit of the band's previous album, Knopfler crafted a series of long-form in-the-studio narratives, a schizophrenic mix of dark romance, flip cynicism and brooding paranoia built around Ed Walsh's menacing synthesizers that seemed to capture early-'80s Britain's dark mood of industrial unease.

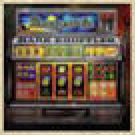
SOLO

MARK KNOPFLER

Shangri-La

(Mercury, 2004)

★★★★



Recorded after seven months' convalescence following a motorbike accident, this conceptual set of songs detailing lost paradises, fallen heroes and vanished worlds might be Knopfler's best complete album, shifting from wise rockers and knowing toe-tappers to the snow-hushed North East gangster narrative of 5.15am and lonesome Elvis meditation, Back To Tupelo.

SOUNDTRACK

MARK KNOPFLER

Local Hero

(Vertigo, 1983)

★★★★

Blending humming synthesizers with a Celtic harp guitar-picking style and the low Uilleann pipes drone that soundtracked his childhood, Knopfler assembled a set of forlorn and reflective instrumentals (plus one vocal piece, sung by the late Gerry Rafferty) for Bill Forsyth's 1983 comedy-drama that, at its most introspective, can still bring tears to the eyes.

COLLABORATION

MARK KNOPFLER AND EMMYLOU HARRIS

All The Roadrunning

(Mercury, 2006)

★★★

Assembled during seven years of stolen transatlantic session time, *All The Roadrunning* is not quite the masterpiece it could have been, but between Partonesque knees-ups and good-time clambakes are a handful of Knopfler treats – languorous picaresques suffused with the twilight harmonies of tired working lives.

From stadiums to garrets: Knopfler alone in '85; (from top) Basil Bunting; Joyce Cary; Roger Hilton; Beryl Bainbridge; Nick Tosches; Breece D'J Pancake.

"*DIRE STRAITS* JUST REACHED THIS SORT OF *CRITICAL MASS*. IT GOT TOO BIG. *THINGS DO*… I WANTED TO BE A LITTLE *MORE FREE*."

MARK KNOPFLER
TRACKER

compact disc. "I was lucky," insists Knopfler. "People from an earlier background… I remember spending the day with Chet Baker in Paris and he said, 'You know, you just go in in the morning and make an album. Might come back in the afternoon and make another one.' Van [Morrison] is part of that generation. A record was just, capture that song at that time. But I came to enjoy the recording process. Was *Making Movies* a statement of intent? I suppose. I was trying to make a record that was going to last."

As documented in a 1980 Arena documentary, Knopfler's brother David left the band during this repositioning, unable to conform to the new hardline regimen. "I wanted to expand the instrumentation," says Knopfler, by way of explanation. "The Straits began as a very stripped down little beat group but then there were keyboards, sax… You become this kind of half-baked arranger and it's bound to… What I'm saying is, a lot of musicians wouldn't even bother with that. They'd just go and play the song, and on to something else."

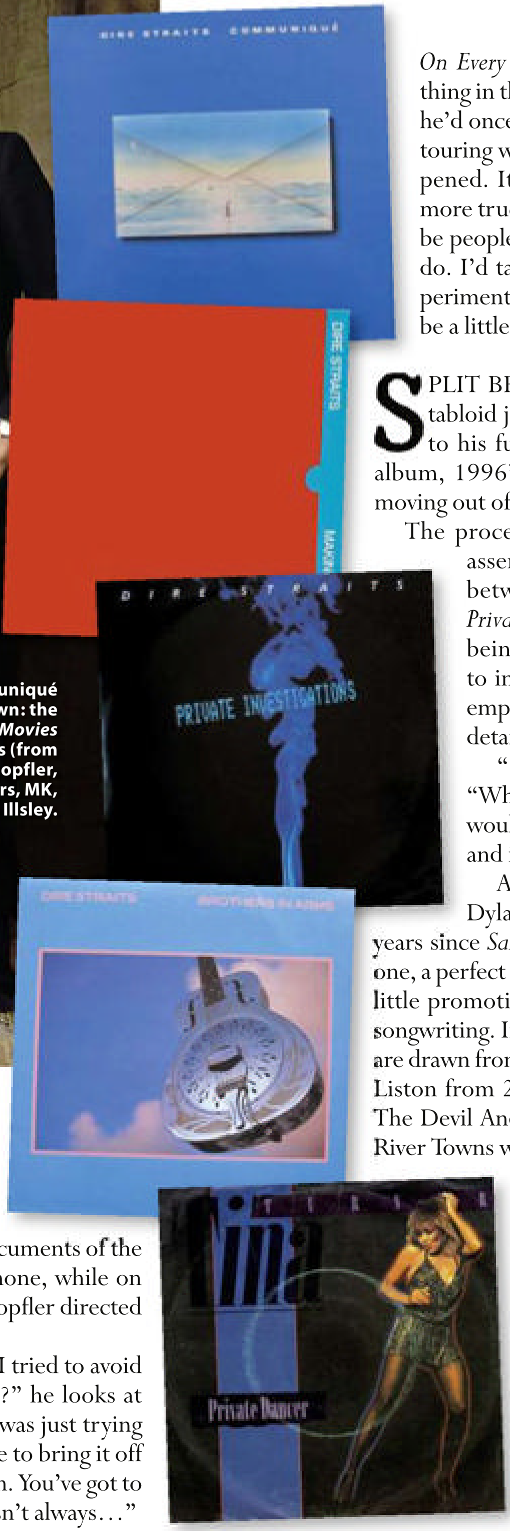
The band's experimental studio incarnation reached its peak on 1982's elegantly sinister *Love Over Gold*: "I was breaking glasses on the floor, recording footsteps, deep breathing, experimenting in a psychoacoustic frame of mind while the label were still asking for singles. I thought, What's the most impossible single that they couldn't possibly work with?"

Knopfler gave them a 6:45 spoken-word album track. Edited to just under six minutes, Private Investigations reached Number 2 in the UK singles charts. Knopfler became the hardest-working man in showbusiness, co-producing Bob Dylan's *Infidels*, composing the wistful Celtic scores for Local Hero, Cal and Comfort And Joy, producing Aztec Camera's second LP, *Knife*, and writing Private Dancer for Tina Turner. But the strangest success was still to come, in May 1985, with the group's fifth studio album, *Brothers In Arms*.

Recorded at Montserrat's AIR Studios, *Brothers In Arms* was one of the first full digital recordings to be released as part of the new CD market. Thanks to the huge US chart success of the singles Walk Of Life, So Far Away and Money For Nothing, the album broke the band in America, eventually selling 30-million copies worldwide. Between that album and its darker coda, 1991's *On Every Street*, Knopfler co-produced Randy Newman's *Land Of Dreams*, collaborated with his old friend and mentor Steve Phillips on The Notting Hillbillies' *Missing… Presumed Having A Good Time* and recorded with longtime hero Chet Atkins, all of which now look like attempts at positive action to counteract the misery of being in Dire Straits, whose final two albums now play like fractured documents of a band's dissolu-

Corbis, Writer Pics, Photoshot, Getty Images (2), Rex

Communiqué breakdown: the pre-*Making Movies* Dire Straits (from left) David Knopfler, Pick Withers, MK, John Illsley.



tion. With Money For Nothing and All My Parties' dissections of '80s consumerism, Knopfler's observational eye had turned mean. So Far Away, When It Comes To You, How Long and Fade To Black were bitter documents of the end of his marriage to Lourdes Salomone, while on Your Latest Trick and Calling Elvis, Knopfler directed the cynicism in on himself.

Knopfler sighs. "I don't think that. I tried to avoid cynicism. I think we all do, don't we?" he looks at MOJO, steely blue eyes narrowing. "I was just trying to get to the soul of something, because to bring it off you've got to get fairly close to your own. You've got to work at getting this stuff up and it doesn't always..."

He tails off. There was, says MOJO, a famous story that, at *Brothers In Arms*' sales peak, he rang up his record label and asked them to stop selling copies of the CD.

"No I didn't," he insists. "I may have said something about the amount of singles being taken off the album. Singles stopped counting for me at a certain point. But single success meant that the record continued to sell so there was huge demand for us to be seen around the world. Then there was the CD thing? Is that the right album? They all combined like a giant snowball. You'd be given these platinum albums with lots of little platinum discs underneath. The only time I ever have to look at that thing is when I go to my accountants' office."

Asked how he feels about popular culture's now somewhat ambivalent attitude to *Brothers In Arms*, Knopfler concedes that "It's a very British thing to be cautious and suspicious of anything like that that swamps the culture and I agree. It's a healthy reaction to have. When you're in the eye of the storm you don't really see the storm. You're so busy."

The lowest point, says Knopfler, came with the last band tour for *On Every Street*. "I think the band was about the biggest thing in the world," he says, as if trying to recall something he'd once been told. "Instead of having one stage we were touring with two or three. I don't quite know how it happened. It reached this sort of critical mass. We needed more truck drivers, and you'd go into catering and there'd be people you didn't recognise. It just got too big. Things do. I'd taken that little four-piece and pushed it up, experimented, and it still wasn't doing it for me. I wanted to be a little bit more free."

SPLIT BETWEEN ITS POISON PEN PORTRAITS OF tabloid journalists and autograph hunters and love songs to his future wife Kitty Aldridge, Knopfler's first solo album, 1996's *Golden Heart*, felt like a transitional record, moving out of the dark past and into a bright future.

The process has been gradual, aided by the unhurried assembly of a crack band of fellow musicians, but between 2000's *Sailing To Philadelphia* to 2012's *Privateering*, Knopfler's style shifted. He stopped being an observer and an eavesdropper and began to inhabit the characters he sang about, bringing an empathic warmth and a quietly heartbreaking poetic detail to his character sketches.

"I would certainly accept that," says Knopfler. "Whenever John Bratby used to do a self portrait he would magnify one of his eyes. It's being both forensic and involved at the same time."

Apart from time out to tour America with Bob Dylan in 2011 and 2012, the pattern down the 15 years since *Sailing To Philadelphia* has been a quiet and simple one, a perfect circle of writing, recording and touring, with very little promotion in between, and everything coming back to songwriting. In fact, many of Knopfler's most convincing songs are drawn from the books he reads on the road. Song For Sonny Liston from 2004's *Shangri-La* was based on Nick Tosches's The Devil And Sonny Liston, while *Tracker*'s gently mournful River Towns was inspired by a short story the late West Virginian writer Breece D'J Pancake.

"I don't read a lot," he insists, "But what I read does tend to inspire me. Sometimes there's a collision between where I am in the world and something I'm reading. That happened with Sailing To Philadelphia [and Thomas Pynchon's Mason & Dixon] and Telegraph Road and [Knut Hamsun's] Growth Of The Soil," he explains. "I was on the tour bus in Detroit, on that massive long straight road, thinking about the beginnings of civilisation. With the beautiful Breece Pancake stories, there was the one story, A Room Forever: this one character in this one story."

Of the remaining songs on *Tracker*, half are love songs and half are tales of drifters and outlaws, yet all are bound by an intimate mood of twilight reflection that seems to say so much about where Mark Knopfler is at in 2015.

As to the future, all he's thinking about at the moment is playing these songs live. Operating outside of the usual media demands he is still able to sell out one night at the O2 and two nights at the Royal Albert Hall, or "a couple of Alberts" as he terms it.

"It's a very fortunate position to be in," he admits, and he sounds genuinely self-effacing as he says this. "It's good to know it's still working for people. Maybe it's a deal between me and them... If they come, I'm going to be trying my best. It's hard to explain what it is, but I think everybody knows what an important part of my life that is. To me it's the logical end of the big wheel going round." Ⓜ

Tracker is out now on Virgin/EMI. Mark Knopfler's UK tour starts on May 15. Go to tour.markknopfler.com for details.

Credit in here

Farewell Farewell

1969 was a year
of tragedy and
transformation for
Fairport Convention.
In this extract from
his acclaimed
Sandy Denny
autobiography,
Mick Houghton
examines the troubled
circumstances that
gave birth to their folk-
rock masterpiece,
Liege & Lief.
Photograph by
Annie Leibovitz

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ON MAY 11, 1969, FAIRPORT CONVENTION PLAYED MOTHERS IN Birmingham, one of the most popular venues on the underground circuit. Cosmopolitan folk rockers Eclection were also on the bill, and Fairport's vocalist Sandy Denny travelled home to London with their bassist, her then boyfriend, Trevor Lucas. The rest of the Fairports piled into their van. Just north of Scratchwood services on the M1, Fairport's van veered across the road. Richard Thompson tried to grab the wheel from the group's driver, Harvey Bramham, who had fallen asleep, but the van hit the side barrier and tumbled down an embankment.

After the crash, only Simon Nicol was left inside the vehicle, relatively unscathed. Of the rest of the group, Thompson, Bramham and Ashley Hutchings were all injured, but drummer Martin Lamble and Jeannie Franklyn, the young American clothes designer who was Thompson's girlfriend, were both dead.

At the time of the crash, Fairport's manager, Joe Boyd, was busy negotiating the group's first US tour, which would have taken in the Fillmore West and the Newport Folk Festival. His production company, Witchseason, issued an official statement: "Those poor children. We are all in a state of shock because this tragedy is so unbelievable."

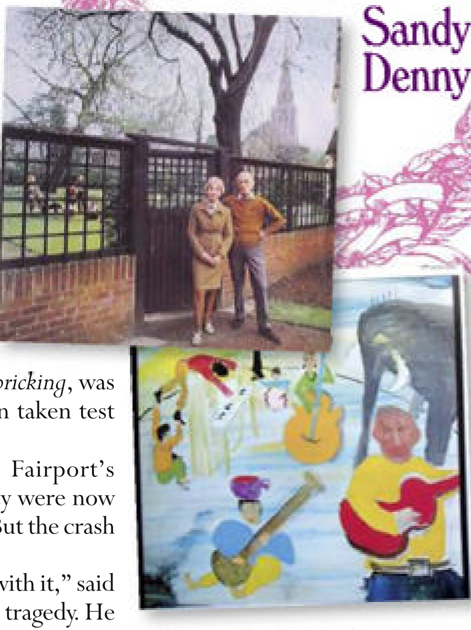
"It was just so fortunate Sandy came in the car with us," says Eclection guitarist Gary Boyle. "I can still picture her and Trevor snuggled up on the back seat."

Linda Thompson (Linda Peters, as she then was) bumped into Sandy and Trevor in a corner shop opposite the Troubadour at four o'clock the morning after the crash. Somebody had called round to tell Sandy what had happened; they didn't want her finding out about it in the papers.

"She was completely shell-shocked. She and Trevor were getting milk or cigarettes or something and she said, 'Martin's dead and Jeannie's dead'. She was rambling. My first thought was that it could have been her in the crash. She and Trevor were already pretty tight but that tightened the knot. I never really heard Sandy say anything about the crash, nor Richard, nor any of the band. We bottled things up back then; stiff upper lip and all that. That's how we were conditioned to react but it's the insouciance of youth, you pick yourself up and you go on."

"They made it clear that if I left, Fairport couldn't play any more."

Sandy Denny



"It could easily have been the end for the band," says Richard Thompson. "For a while we didn't know if we were going to carry on."

The album Fairport Convention had finished a month earlier, *Unhalfbricking*, was ready for release. Joe Boyd had even taken test pressings to America.

"I was quite convinced it was Fairport's breakthrough album," he says. "They were now a really great band and they knew it. But the crash put everything on hold."

"I didn't really know how to deal with it," said Sandy in 1977. "Martin's death was a tragedy. He was probably the member of the band I'd got to know least – I think he may have been a bit scared of me. I needed to get away. I didn't want to become Fairport's spokesperson. So I went to America."

Although Sandy had decided to go to Los Angeles, her fear of flying was heightened following the crash. Joe Boyd and Simon Nicol were already there, so she took the flight with Richard Thompson. "Sandy could imagine the worst happening at any point, which was why it was torture to be on a plane with her," says Thompson. "White knuckles. In the first 20 minutes I had a large drink spilt in my lap. I just sat there soaking for hours."

However much Sandy enjoyed the trip on the surface – going to a party at Phil Ochs's house, meeting Mimi Fariña, seeing the "amazing" John Lee Hooker at the Experience on Sunset Strip, and going to see the film Monterey Pop – she was "missing Trevor awfully". She makes no mention of playing the [Los Angeles] Troubadour as a trio with Thompson and Nicol; billed as a Sandy Denny gig and her American debut. Thompson's recollection is almost deliberately vague, but when pushed, he remembers it as a pretty awful experience.

Ashley Hutchings' crash injuries were more serious than those suffered by the rest of the band, and had taken longer to heal. While the others went to America and Nicol readied *Unhalfbricking* for release, Hutchings spent much of his recuperative time in Cecil Sharp House, learning more about traditional music. If Fairport were to continue, they needed a new repertoire. Yet Sandy, for one, was uncertain.

"Describing it coldly now makes it sound like emotional blackmail," she said, 10 years later, "but it certainly wasn't. They just made it clear that if I left, Fairport couldn't play any more. They'd already been through that. Most of the old repertoire from the first album had been dumped. If I left, history would repeat itself. I think it was Anne Briggs who finally said I ought to carry on. She said, 'You have to. Those boys need you. They'd be lost without you.'"

SO, ON JULY 6, 1969, ASHLEY HUTCHings, Richard Thompson and Simon Nicol gathered at Sandy and Trevor's new flat in Parsons Green. They had just been told that Island had scheduled *Unhalfbricking* for release in late July and Si Tu Dois Partir was to be the advance single.

"I'm not sure what we'd have done if Sandy had left," says Nicol, "but there seemed a general assumption we would continue. We didn't talk about the accident but we all felt if we didn't pursue the band, Martin's loss would have been for nothing."

"Sandy wasn't in the crash," says Hutchings, "but she was enormously damaged by what happened. We're all damaged by it and lost in a way, which helps to understand why we had to take that different step, to make *Liege & Lief* and go down that path."

"She never forgave herself over the Fairport crash," says her friend Philippa Clare. "She had survivor's guilt big time. That was when she and Trevor really got together."

Richard Bennett-Zeff

Before the crash: Fairport Convention (from left) Iain Matthews, Martin Lamble, Witchseason's Anthea Joseph, Sandy Denny, Simon Nicol, Richard Thompson with Ashley Hutchings (sitting at front) plus park keepers and kids; (opposite, from top) *Liege & Lief*, debut album *Unhalfbricking*, The Band's influential *Music From Big Pink*.

"She was rescued by Trevor," says another of Sandy's close friends, Bambi Ballard. "That cemented their relationship. There was neediness in Sandy, far greater than any she had before. She had avoided being in the crash thanks to Trevor and because Trevor looked after her it created a dependency on him. The stress of travelling for Sandy was also greater afterwards because she never forgot that terrible crash."

"[Sandy] had this chance of a relationship and wanted to grab it," says Joe Boyd. "It made her more anxious about having a secure emotional life and therefore less willing to take risks. And that may have influenced her to stay with Fairport because that was safe. Eventually Fairport came to me and said they had decided to carry on but were never going to do the same material again. *Music From Big Pink* hit London like a ton of bricks that summer and became the soundtrack while they were recovering. So much of what they had done up to then was American in style, looking to Dylan or Joni. But *Big Pink* kind of said, 'Forget it. You're not American, you're never even going to come close to understanding or interpreting this music. Forget about even trying.' It put up a wall but at the same time was inspiring."

"*Big Pink* came as a bit of a shock," says Richard Thompson. "It seemed to vault over the *Zeitgeist*, back to purer roots – kind of counter-counterculture."

Yet just as the group were moving on, *Unhalfbricking* was released. Unlike the group's previous albums, it went straight into the charts, where it stayed for two months, peaking at Number 12, while the extracted single, Si Tu Dois Partir, climbed to Number 21.

"It's all quite unreal," says Hutchings, "because we did almost nothing to promote *Unhalfbricking*. To some extent we couldn't because some of us were still recuperating. We couldn't return to those songs so we didn't do any radio sessions, and there were certainly no gigs."

Having confirmed Fairport would carry on, Anthea Joseph at Witchseason booked a rehearsal space at Farley House, a Queen Anne mansion in the village of Farley Chamberlayne, near Winchester in Hampshire, found through the classified pages of The Lady.

But first, the group had to find a new drummer. Auditions took place in a pub back room on Chiswick High Street. The main audition song was Sandy's Autopsy, chosen because of its difficult time signatures. The eventual recruit, Dave Mattacks, was asked to join there and then. Twenty-four hours later Mattacks confessed to Hutchings that he didn't understand the music at all, couldn't tell one tune from another. Mattacks' background was jazz, including nine months in a Belfast dance band.

➢

"I was utterly unfamiliar with that genre of music," he says. "I knew something good was happening but I was dumbfounded with all of them. They were all very bright and their priorities were different from people I'd played with up to that time. Sandy was very effervescent and bubbly and just had the most amazing voice. I'd not heard singing of that ilk before or singing that good. She was so welcoming. When we did the instrumentals on *Liege & Lief*, I remember her saying, 'We knew he was good but we didn't know he was that good.'"

Mattacks' integration into Fairport was made easier because he and Dave Swarbrick were effectively joining the band together. Although Swarbrick had played on pre-crash sessions for A Sailor's Life and Si Tu Dois Partir, he didn't become a full member until the Farley Chamberlayne rehearsals.

WITH MATTACKS AND SWARBRICK ON BOARD, THE new six-piece Fairport were 'getting it together in the country', by now an almost clichéd process begun when the newly-formed Traffic went off to a Berkshire cottage in 1967.

"We had never done that before," says Simon Nicol. "We had never cohabited. We all lived locally and we'd rehearse in church halls and go home afterwards. *Liege & Lief* would probably have been a different record if we'd recorded it in London and not gone to Farley Chamberlayne."

"It was the first time we took ourselves away from the routine of being a working band," says Ashley Hutchings. "We'd come down in the morning, have breakfast and go into the living room where all the instruments were set up – and play. It's still mind-boggling to me. Such an incredible beacon. It was a mammoth step."

"It was an escape from the world," says Richard Thompson, "although not from our private thoughts. We were breaking in two new people, but the rest of us needed to get the measure of each other again too. It was important to work and play together again, and we did relax, kick a ball about in the gardens, just go for walks or go to the local pub and play darts. Normal everyday things like that. There was no strict regime, no set times when we'd start playing, sometimes after breakfast, sometimes late into the night."

"For all of us," says Nicol, "*Liege & Lief* was the fuel to rebuilding and rebonding the band. We never doubted the concept but we did see it as a project. It was not supposed to be the doorway to a new world."

In the middle of all this, Si Tu Dois Partir charted and on August 14, 1969, the group found themselves on Britain's primary pop TV programme, Top Of The Pops. It marked the first public appearances in Fairport by Dave Swarbrick and Dave Mattacks; Ashley Hutchings used a baguette to bow the strings of a huge Perspex double bass, while others in the group elected to wear striped shirts, berets and garlands of onions. "We didn't take it entirely seriously," says Hutchings. "It was probably a mistake. Whatever we were aiming for, I think we just looked silly."

island
SI TU DOIS PARTIR, VA T'EN
FAIRPORT CONVENTION

Sandy was scathing about the experience in print six months later, dismissing the song and the show with surprising venom, given that the French language Dylan cover had originally been her idea. "That was a load of rubbish," she said. "The people who bought that record were cheated. If they didn't know us they'd think we were some French group. And the things that went with it – I don't think I'll ever do Top Of The Pops again – absolute rubbish that single was."

Two days after appearing on the programme, Sandy was interviewed by Nick Logan for the NME, giving outsiders the first indication of Fairport's new path.

"The accident taught me I loved them all," she said. "The next album is going to be completely different; it will be based around traditional British folk music to which we may put new words if necessary. We're not making it pop though. In fact it will be almost straight, only electric… heavy, traditional folk music."

A week earlier Sandy had told Disc that "We've really been getting into traditional English music… we put old traditional music with electric instruments and our own words and it really sounds nice . . . though it shouldn't. We're going along a completely different road now. It's really put a new breath of life into us."

"The chemistry worked and the line-up was sensational," says Dave Swarbrick. "We were all inventing ways to translate folk to rock. Everybody dipped their oar in. [Sandy] had a great voice, timing, swing, musicality; being a pianist meant she knew how chords were made up and what note to sing to complement the given melody line. She had great empathy, so she could share the emotion of a phrase with the audience, tell a story, paint a picture, aim the song. She was vulnerable, and that was moving, she could be a girl or a woman, she had a great range too. And technically she was great. The tradition has only one kind of improvisation – decoration – and she was a master of that, weaving little curly bits and ornamentation and playing around the line, beautifying it. She was able to draw on her harmonic education too. And then she could throw her head back and let go. I haven't seen her like since she died."

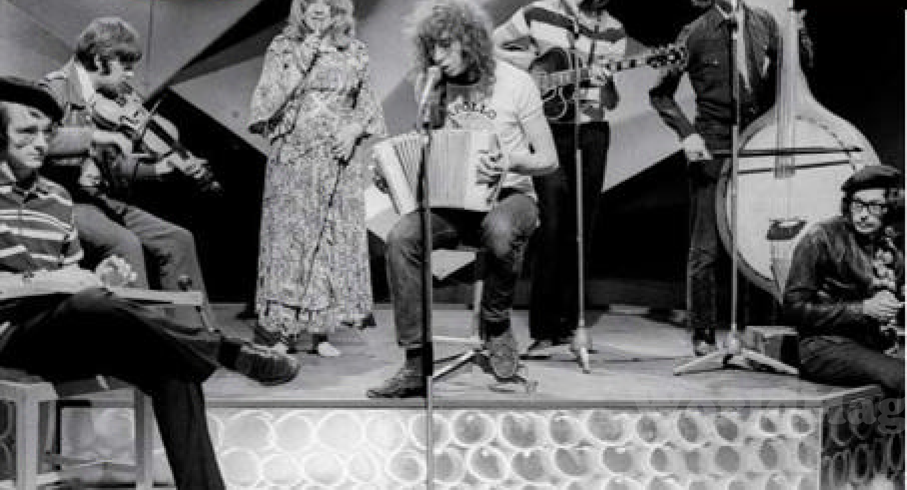
"She was one of the very, very few there have ever been and certainly the best who could sing traditional folk songs with a rock sensibility," says Ashley Hutchings. "June Tabor can't do it. Maddy can't do it. Shirley Collins can't. The best singers in England have tried and Sandy was the best. She naturally understood how to sing traditional songs and she could translate that into a rock context. Nobody did that better."

The new Fairport ensemble didn't just play traditional songs. The spirit of *Big Pink* encouraged them to delve back into their own basement tapes.

"The emphasis was on traditional material," says Richard Thompson, "and that was being driven by Ashley and Swarb. But we'd also return to familiar territory – Dylan, country music, rock'n'roll. We were figuring out what we were going to do, and we weren't analysing it. Perhaps now when I'm asked I'll say that we were combining the freedom of rock'n'roll with the ballad style of folk, or something like that, but that's not how we saw it at the time."

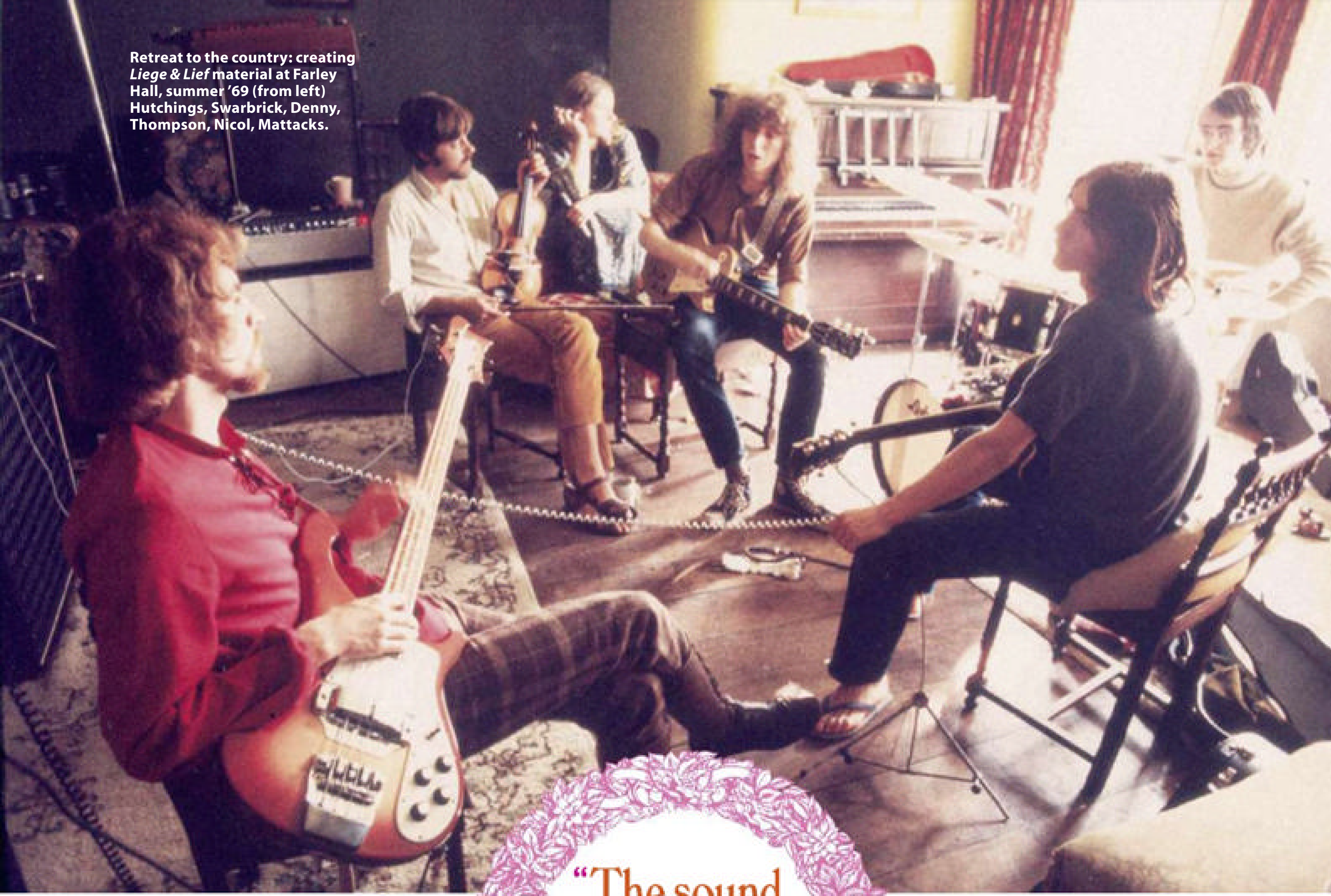
Thompson's two original contributions are perhaps the most moving on the album. Farewell, Farewell and Crazy Man Michael address the loss they all felt after the crash. Meanwhile, Sandy's sole album credit is for the words to the only song she ever collaborated on with Hutchings: Come All Ye joyfully kick-starts the album and the band's radical reboot of traditional folk song.

The live shows around *Liege & Lief* – too fitful to be described as a tour – began at the Van Dyke Club in Plymouth on September 20, 1969, a warm-up for the Royal Festival Hall four days later, where Dave Swarbrick and Dave Mattacks had been announced as making their concert debut with Fairport. The Festival Hall concert was an emotional return to a venue they had played a year before, almost to the day, but it was particularly nerve-racking for Sandy. Even the more resilient Swarbrick must have had the odd butterfly in his



If you gotta go: Fairport with new members Dave Mattacks and Dave Swarbrick (first and second left) perform Si Tu Dois Partir on Top Of The Pops, August 14, 1969.

Rex, Eric Hayes



Retreat to the country: creating *Liege & Lief* material at Farley Hall, summer '69 (from left) Hutchings, Swarbrick, Denny, Thompson, Nicol, Mattacks.

> "The sound that was being produced was so exciting. Nothing like it existed."
>
> Dave Swarbrick

stomach; the audience was full of folkies, after all, many of whom were his and Sandy's friends.

"Did we feel we were making history?" ponders Swarbrick. "Sometimes, just a little; the sound that was being produced was so exciting for me. To hear a song I knew from folk clubs take on such power was exhilarating. Nothing like it existed."

John Renbourn remembers the Daily Telegraph's folk correspondent Maurice Rosenbaum running for the exit doors "with his fingers in both ears, saying they were terribly loud", but Sandy delightedly recalled being accosted by A. L. Lloyd afterwards. "Bert Lloyd was one of the first people backstage to say, 'It's the most exciting thing I've heard for years.' It was pretty special for a while because it was so different. Nobody had thought of doing it before."

The pertinent phrase there is "for a while". The doubts Sandy was having, and other underlying fears, were now coming to the fore.

In among the sporadic live dates, *Liege & Lief* was recorded at Sound Techniques over six days between October 16 and November 1. It was a triumph all round: an undeniable artistic success, a tremendous ensemble accomplishment and a conceptual album that doesn't buckle under the weight of its intentions. To have completed such a rigorously challenging album in just six days speaks for Fairport's professionalism and instrumental prowess. It also highlights engineer John Wood's skills and Joe Boyd's ability to capture unobtrusively what was 'in the room'.

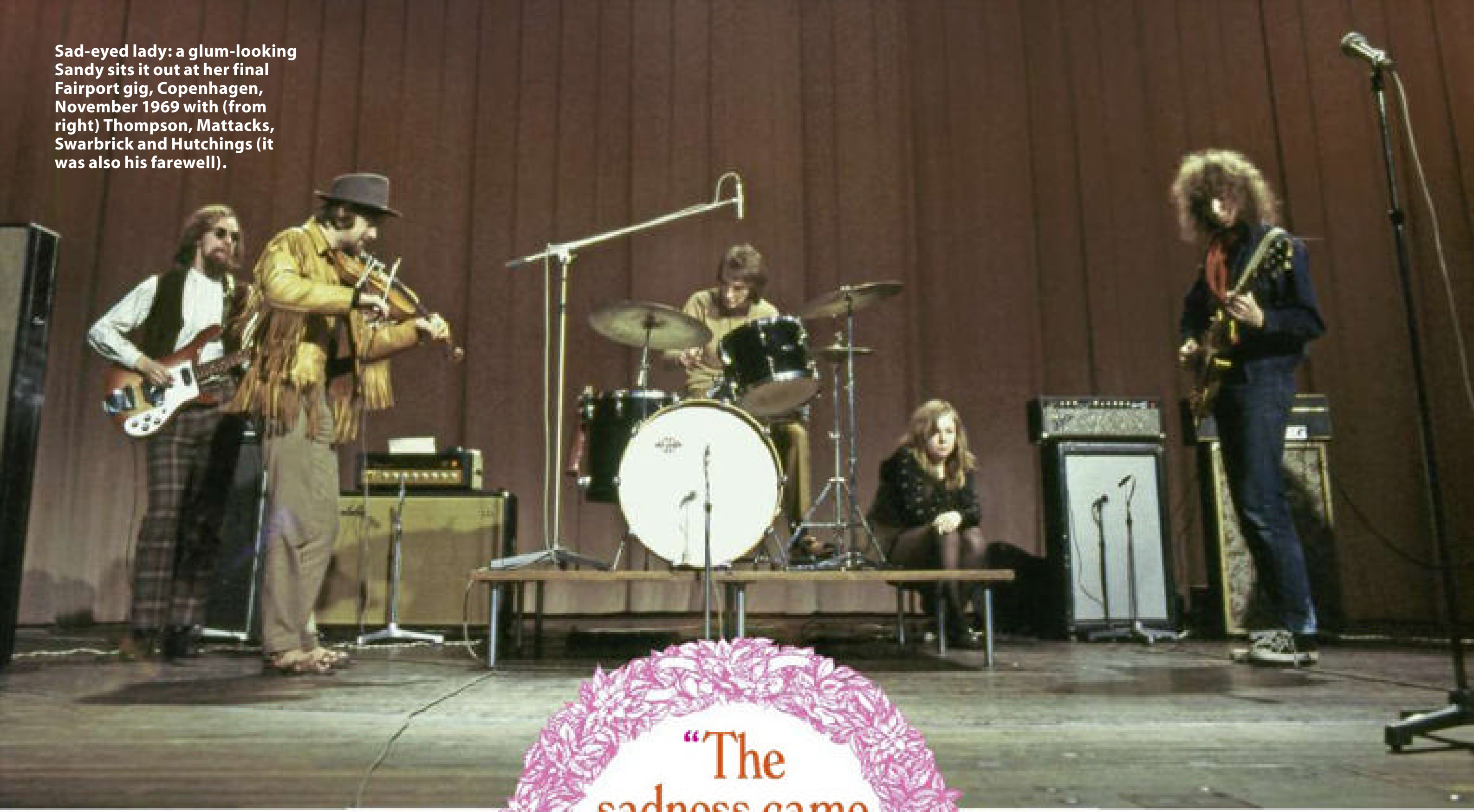
For the first time on a Fairport album only one singer is featured. Sandy rises to the challenge, taking us through every emotion after the stirring Come All Ye sets the scene. The manner in which she conveys the reverse fortunes suffered by the protagonists in Matty Groves and The Deserter is quite astonishing. Matty Groves begins optimistically and ends with the lovers both doomed, while The Deserter goes from sublime sadness to gleeful relish as the condemned man is saved from the gallows.

Arguably, Sandy's finest vocals are saved for the two Richard Thompson originals, whose content is so poetic and deeply personal in addressing loss, guilt and pain. Farewell, Farewell is almost dreamlike, set to the tune of the traditional Willie O' Winsbury, Sandy's vocal haunting, almost whispered at times. Crazy Man Michael, the first songwriting collaboration between Thompson and Swarbrick, is delivered with almost unbearable empathy and sensitivity, Sandy at her melancholy best, here matched by Thompson's eerie electric guitar.

FOR JOE BOYD, THE IMPACT OF *LIEGE & LIEF* WAS FELT immediately after the Royal Festival Hall, though the album wasn't even recorded yet. "All the signs were that it was going to be something big. Within a week of the Festival Hall we're getting phone calls asking, 'Can they come and do this, can they come and do that?' and A&M were asking, 'When can they come to America?' At the same time, Sandy was pointedly moaning that 'I don't want to fly, do we really have to do this?' It was classic Sandy; everything she had worked for, everything she wanted was within reach but suddenly she wasn't sure it was what she really wanted."

The crux of the problem – as everybody could see – was her relationship with Lucas.

"It was as simple and straightforward to Sandy as carrying on and losing Trevor or jumping ship," says Simon Nicol. "And that's what she chose to do. For the first time in her life she had a settled relationship and she didn't want to give it up. I didn't see it coming but I wasn't surprised. I was always fearful of it happening ➢


Sad-eyed lady: a glum-looking Sandy sits it out at her final Fairport gig, Copenhagen, November 1969 with (from right) Thompson, Mattacks, Swarbrick and Hutchings (it was also his farewell).

> "The sadness came out in the songs. We tried to move on and then it started to unravel."
> Ashley Hutchings

≺ because they were very strongly bonded as a couple and, at the same time, Trevor had a reputation as a 'swordsman', which worried her, and they had separate careers taking them in different directions."

"She didn't have the confidence to go on the road for a month and know he'd still be there," says Boyd.

"Fairport was aware of the conflict over Trevor," says Thompson, "and I think we knew at some point it would come to a head. I could always see her and Trevor getting together in a musical partnership. You would hear Sandy and Trevor singing together and it was great – their voices blended really well. And that was something she didn't have in Fairport. We weren't going to bring another guitarist into Fairport, so we weren't going to bring Trevor into the band. As a result, we didn't rule out that at some point she was going to leave. She hit a crisis point; I think the decision when it came was quite sudden."

However much Joe Boyd was concerned about Sandy's issues with travelling and Trevor, there was a third factor he had overlooked: "What I was the slowest to pick up on was Sandy feeling like she didn't want to be in a band that did nothing but traditional music. She'd say, 'I'm writing songs, where are they going to go?' Ultimately that could have been resolved; if Sandy hadn't had the flying anxiety and the Trevor anxiety, she and Richard could have figured out a way for Fairport to accommodate their writing, but it didn't last long enough for that to get explored."

For Sandy, the high spirits of the rehearsals dissipated during the live dates, particularly those following the recording of the album, which included a daunting return to Mothers Club on November 2. The Birmingham gig was traumatic for everyone and the return journey was almost a silent vigil. Sandy was in tears throughout.

"Everything seemed to come to a head," she explained later. "The things I wanted to do with my life – personally and professionally – didn't fit in with staying with Fairport. But I loved the band and all the guys in it. I loved making music with them. In fact, I continued to record with them right through my career – if you just read the credits on my solo albums, it's obvious. But that night, it got on top of me. The emotion of the gig, the long cold journey back and wanting to be with Trevor."

She told Joe Boyd that she didn't want to do the American tour they had been offered and that she didn't even want to travel to Denmark for an upcoming TV date. When other members of Fairport went to pick Sandy up to go to the airport, she simply wasn't there. She finally arrived the next day for what turned out to be her and Ashley Hutchings' last performance with the band, recorded on November 7 at TV-Byen in Gladsaxe, near Copenhagen.

In the midst of the turmoil, Sandy met with Joe Boyd to ask him what future she would have if she left the group. Boyd was caught between wanting her to stay in Fairport and reassuring her that she would have no problem getting a solo deal. He was aware of – and probably excited by – the possibilities of both. In the end, neither scenario worked out. The actual announcement came in the music press on November 22; it cited "Sandy's unwillingness to travel" and Hutchings' desire to "concentrate on traditional folk music".

THE RELEASE OF *LIEGE & LIEF* FOLLOWED ON December 2. There was never any question of Fairport Convention not continuing. "After the double blow of Sandy and Ashley leaving," says Simon Nicol, "we never thought, We can't carry on, because we'd overcome the crash and rebuilt the band and made this hugely successful record – not in terms of sales, but as an artistic piece of work."

"I wasn't surprised that Sandy left when she did," says Hutchings. "The underlying feeling I remember at that time was a manic feeling. We'd had the crash, we'd not discussed it, in true English-reserve middle-class fashion, we'd brushed it under the carpet and moved on and we didn't have a mass moment of grief, apart from private grief, where it all came out and we talked about it.

"It came out in the songs. Richard wrote Farewell, Farewell in particular, but basically we tried to move on and then it started to unravel in a delayed reaction which was sparked by Sandy refusing to go on the flight to Denmark. She was scared stiff of getting on the plane and she got drunk, and she wasn't there when we arrived to pick her up."

Jan Persson/Getty Images, Linda Fitzgerald-Moore/Island Archives

"Our reaction was, Well, fuck her," recalls Hutchings, "and we actually discussed whether this was the end for Sandy: If she doesn't want to do it, we'll get another singer in. We'll ask her to leave. Then she was bundled on the plane by Anthea Joseph and flew out the next day. And that didn't make everything right and I remember being slightly disappointed that she turned up. We were manic, and I'm sure it was a delayed reaction to the crash. Creating and recording *Liege & Lief* had suspended that moment.

"I don't know why I left Fairport," continues Hutchings. "It wasn't to form Steeleye Span, which I did do. After I left the band I had dizzy spells and there was a downward path into a minor breakdown. I'm sure Sandy didn't know what she was doing when she left either. And if you had asked us both – and this is just my theory – two or three months later, 'Would you like to rejoin, to just expunge those last two months since you left?' I bet we both would have said yes. It's very, very strange."

None of the band remembers it this way, although Hutchings concedes it might have been said in the heat of the moment after the trip to Denmark, but Linda Thompson recalls Sandy saying that they asked her to leave the group.

"They definitely sacked her," she says. "It wasn't told that way. I think they knew she was in a state about it. When they were at the airport and Sandy didn't show up, they could see how it was going to be; she didn't want to tour, certainly not in America, and leave Trevor, and they sacked her, and that flabbergasted her more than anything. 'What! Sack me?'"

In years to come, Sandy never spoke about the *Liege & Lief* experience with the same fondness she declared for her early folk years or with Fotheringay; she was often dismissive when people said the album represented her best work.

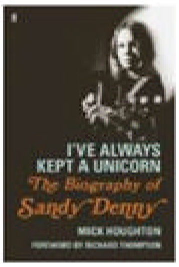
"I still don't recall that time very clearly," she said in 1977, "because it was just after the accident and we lost Martin. Everybody was still in shock and we really didn't know what we were doing. We just sort of did those crazy things and it worked. I know what happened to me; I wanted my own life, which was why I branched out."

In an NME interview in March 1970, the first time she spoke openly about it, Sandy insisted she had not left Fairport to do "a big star solo thing". She said that she hadn't wanted to go to America and had let them down in Copenhagen. "And they thought I would freak out on them again. So they said it would be better if I left. I was already coming to the same conclusion."

It's an unusually revealing interview. Asked whether she would feature any Fairport songs on the forthcoming tour, she retorts, "What's the point?" and says she's not too worried about comparisons with her old group: "Unless they say I should have stayed with Fairport. That would really do me in."

The *Liege & Lief* press advertisements described it as "The first (literally) British Folk Rock LP ever". Above the names of the group they stated: "Documenting a (very brief) era". Reviews were mostly respectful rather than unreservedly enthusiastic. At best reviewers found the record worthy, and admired what Fairport were attempting. The Sounds reviewer, however, was the first to declare what has since become gospel: that Fairport Convention's renderings of folk songs were "the most magnetic versions yet conceived".

Sandy played at Les Cousins for the last time in December. In her solo set, which reflected her career up to that point, *Liege & Lief* was represented only by Crazy Man Michael. She played She Moves Through The Fair and Who Knows Where The Time Goes?, both of which pre-dated Fairport, and Leonard Cohen's Bird On A Wire, a song she had recorded with Fairport for a BBC session. Her set that night featured just one new song, The Pond And The Stream, which she would soon record, not as a solo artist but with the new group she was forming with Trevor Lucas.

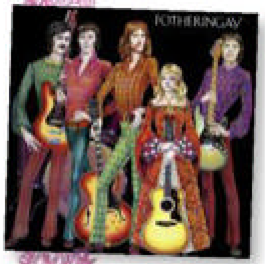


Except where noted, all comments by Sandy Denny are taken from Nigel Schofield's book, Fairport by Fairport. I've Always Kept A Unicorn: The Biography of Sandy Denny (Faber & Faber) by Mick Houghton is out now. Visit www.faber.co.uk for more details.

Defying Convention

What Sandy did next.

Andrew Male chooses the singer's greatest post-Fairports performances.

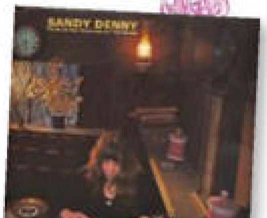


Banks Of The Nile

(from Fotheringay, Island, 1970)

Although not as loved as her work with the Fairports, the first LP by the group Denny formed with husband Trevor Lucas contains some of her most pure and stirring performances, nowhere more so than on Lucas's restrained and spare arrangement of this Napoleonic ballad.

The North Star Grassman And The Ravens



(from The North Star Grassman And The Ravens, Island, 1971)

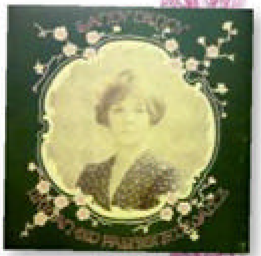
Arguably the solo Denny LP most imbued with the spirit of the singer's own turbulent inner self, *TNSGATR* is a chilly otherworldly work, best exemplified by this cryptic title track, a repurposing of eerie Child Ballad folk symbolism in memory of a seaman friend of Sandy's called Tigger.

Quiet Joys Of Brotherhood

(from Sandy, Island, 1972)

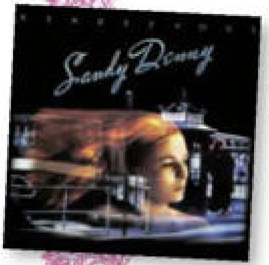
This Richard Fariña cover was originally conceived during the Fairports' *Liege & Lief* sessions. Here the original's droning arrangement is ditched for the traditional Irish melody, My Lagan Love, Sandy's multitracked vocals joining the wintry cry of Dave Swarbrick's fiddle.

No End (solo piano version)



(available on Like An Old Fashioned Waltz CD reissue)

Recorded on a Bechstein concert grand at Walthamstow Assembly Hall on December 3, 1972, this wintry conversation between friends might also be an autobiographical Denny lamenting failed dreams and creative indolence. The perfect performance, heartbreakingly prescient, it was inexplicably re-recorded for the album with a lush excess of strings.



I'm A Dreamer

(from Rendezvous, Island, 1977)

Recorded live with an orchestra at Island's Basing Street Studios, I'm A Dreamer is a stand-out track from Sandy's patchy final LP. It's an album hampered by overdubs but here the space between the grandiose production, the confessional lyrics and Denny's heartbreakingly broken vocals is almost unbearably poignant.

Solo Sandy: Denny in 1970.

DR LOVE

MACHINE

BETWEEN 1974 AND 1986 **GIORGIO MORODER** TRANSFORMED POP AND DISCO WITH A NEW KIND OF EUPHORIC MACHINE MUSIC. NOW, AFTER HIS 2013 SPOT ON DAFT PUNK'S *RANDOM ACCESS MEMORIES*, HE'S BACK WITH A NEW ALBUM. HE TELLS **DORIAN LYNSKEY** ABOUT THE HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS JET-SET CAREER.

"More cheese!" Giorgio Moroder parties poolside with friends at the height of it all, April 1979.

Getty Images

ONE DAY IN THE EARLY 1980S, GIORGIO Moroder went on a $25,000 date. Back then, the writer-producer was in the middle of a decade-long hot streak which included seven Billboard Number 1 singles, three Oscars, two Grammys and the theme song for the Los Angeles Olympics. His imperium extended across the dancefloor, the multiplex and the upper echelons of the charts. He dated starlets half his age and was snapped by the paparazzi at Los Angeles hotspot Spago, which he christened for his restaurateur friend Wolfgang Puck. He owned an ultramodern white mansion in Beverly Hills (bought from Vidal Sassoon and renamed The Ice Castle) along with homes in Aspen, Munich and Lucerne. Only the best restaurants, hotels and first-class flights would do. So, all things considered, $25,000 wasn't a stretch.

"I took my girlfriend on Concorde to Paris," he says. "We had a beautiful dinner, went to the Hotel George V, then took the Concorde back to New York the next day." He looks both embarrassed and amused. "I spent a lot of money."

Moroder hasn't had to worry about cash flow for a very long time. After slowing down dramatically in the late '80s, he lived in Italy and Paris and considered himself retired from music. He backed out of working with his admirer, Hans Zimmer, on the soundtracks to Rush and Man Of Steel and regretted agreeing to write a song for the 2008 Beijing Olympics after an exhausting ordeal involving around 100 different versions. "I was thinking, OK, if the right occasion comes I would do it but I was not looking for it."

Instead of music, Moroder spent his time playing golf with his wife, making digital and neon art, and designing a series of deluxe pet projects, including a Lamborghini sports car, a cognac bottle and a pyramid-shaped apartment complex in Dubai that was stalled by the economic crash. "It was probably too huge," he concedes.

Clearly, the life of a jetset dilettante has been kind to Moroder. At 74, his tanned face is lined rather than wrinkled. His recently regrown moustache, like his swept-back hair, is a lustrous steel-grey. He wears a North Face fleece, black trousers and expensive-looking striped socks. He is Italian – a Commendatore of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, no less – but says he has an "international" mentality. He resembles the kind of quietly confident *éminence grise* you might see in Davos, en route from the ski slopes to a symposium on quantitative easing.

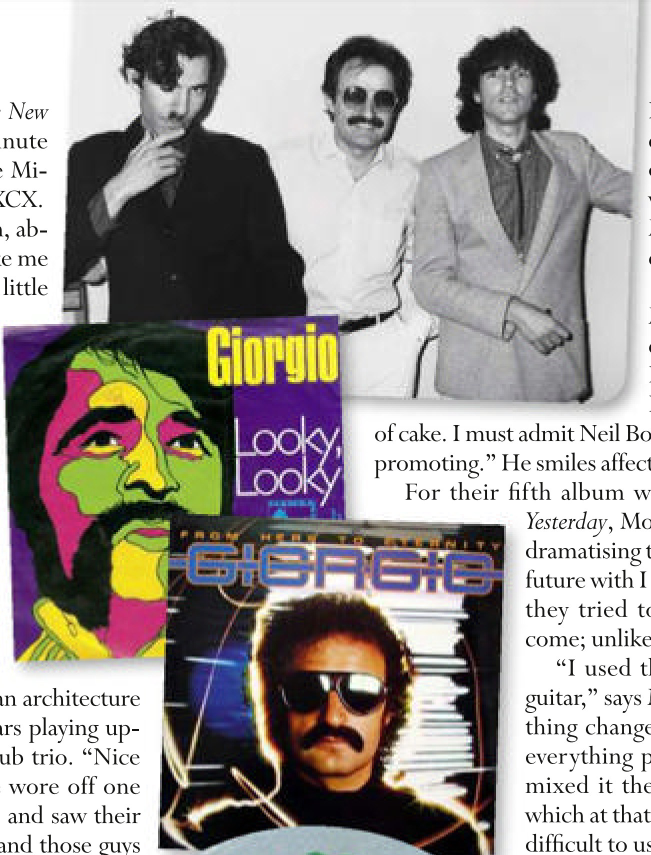
His voice is instantly familiar from Giorgio By Moroder, the 2013 track that Daft Punk fashioned, improbably, from a two-hour interview. Such is Daft Punk's cachet that the mere announcement of this collaboration led to offers of DJ gigs (his first ever), remixes (Coldplay, Haim) and, eventually, deals to make his first studio album since 1990.

Energised by the attention, and by the realisation that EDM contains thick strands of Moroder DNA, he began reacquainting himself with ➢

≺ the Top 40. The result is *74 Is The New 24*, full of surprisingly up-to-the minute dance-pop featuring the likes of Kylie Minogue, Britney Spears, Sia and Charli XCX.

"I did not want to do a disco album, absolutely not," he says. "That would take me back. The combination of EDM and a little bit retro I think is ideal. When you come back after 30 years you can risk a little bit but not too much."

Moroder has handled his comeback like he's lived his life for the last 40 years: with no expense spared.



GIOVANNI GIORGIO Moroder was born to innkeepers in the tiny north Italian mountain town of Ortisei in 1940. His earliest memory is the sound of Luftwaffe bombers overhead. In his youth, he dropped out of an architecture course and spent an enjoyable few years playing upright bass around Europe in a nightclub trio. "Nice money, interesting cities." The shine wore off one night when they went to another club and saw their greying doppelgangers. "I was 22, 23 and those guys were probably 50." He mimes plucking a bass with a kill-me-now expression. "I thought, Oh God, if I don't stop now I'm going to end up like them. That was the day I decided that's it."

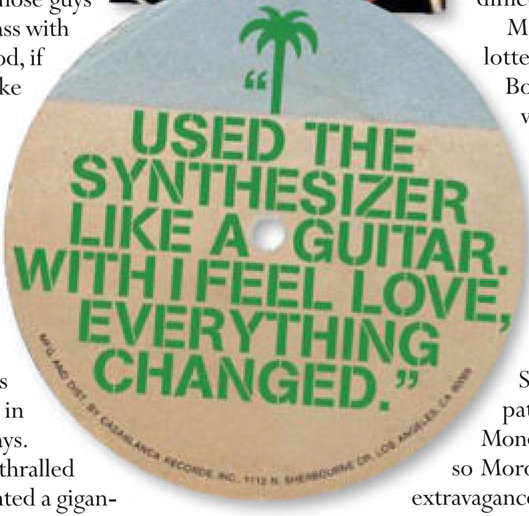
Moroder saved enough money to support himself while he tried to make it as a singer and composer. In Berlin and later Munich, Moroder was a hungry opportunist who dabbled in styles including schlager, the naff German version of bubblegum, which he hated. In a YouTube clip of the lushly moustachioed Moroder performing his 1969 solo hit Looky Looky, he is the epitome of swinger chic. "I was stuck in Germany, I was just trying to get out," he says.

Moroder was saved by a synthesizer. Enthralled by Wendy Carlos's *Switched-On Bach*, he rented a gigantic modular Moog from classical composer Eberhard Schoener and started to play around with collaborator Pete Bellotte and programmer Robbie Wedel. His Moog-powered adventures included Chicory Tip's gauche Son Of My Father (1972) and the experimental, Tangerine Dream-inspired *Einzelgänger* (1975) but, he says, "nothing really interesting until Love To Love You Baby."

In 1974, Moroder met a Boston-born, Munich-based back-up singer called Donna Summer and acquired a drum machine. These two developments combined with the notion of recording a playfully erotic disco record in the spirit of Serge Gainsbourg's Je T'Aime (Moi Non Plus) to produce Love To Love You Baby. Moroder sent it to Neil Bogart, president of New York-based Casablanca Records, who loved it so much that he demanded a side-long extended version. It went platinum, giving Moroder the big break he had craved for so long.

"It was an absolute surprise," Moroder says. "I never thought it could work that well. I thought, OK, I've made it. Now everything is easy. If that one works the rest is a piece of cake. I must admit Neil Bogart helped a lot. He was a genius at promoting." He smiles affectionately. "Probably paying payola."

For their fifth album with Summer, 1977's *I Remember Yesterday*, Moroder and Bellotte had the idea of dramatising the history of pop, ending up in the future with I Feel Love. Like many synth-lovers, they tried to predict the sound of things to come; unlike most, they actually got it right.


MFG. AND DIST. BY CASABLANCA RECORDS INC. 1112 N. SHERBOURNE DR. LOS ANGELES, CA 90069

"I USED THE SYNTHESIZER LIKE A GUITAR. WITH I FEEL LOVE, EVERYTHING CHANGED."

"I used the synthesizer like I would use a guitar," says Moroder. "With I Feel Love everything changed. I wanted to make a song with everything played by a synthesizer. When we mixed it the engineer came up with a delay, which at that time was completely new and very difficult to use, and I said, Wow!"

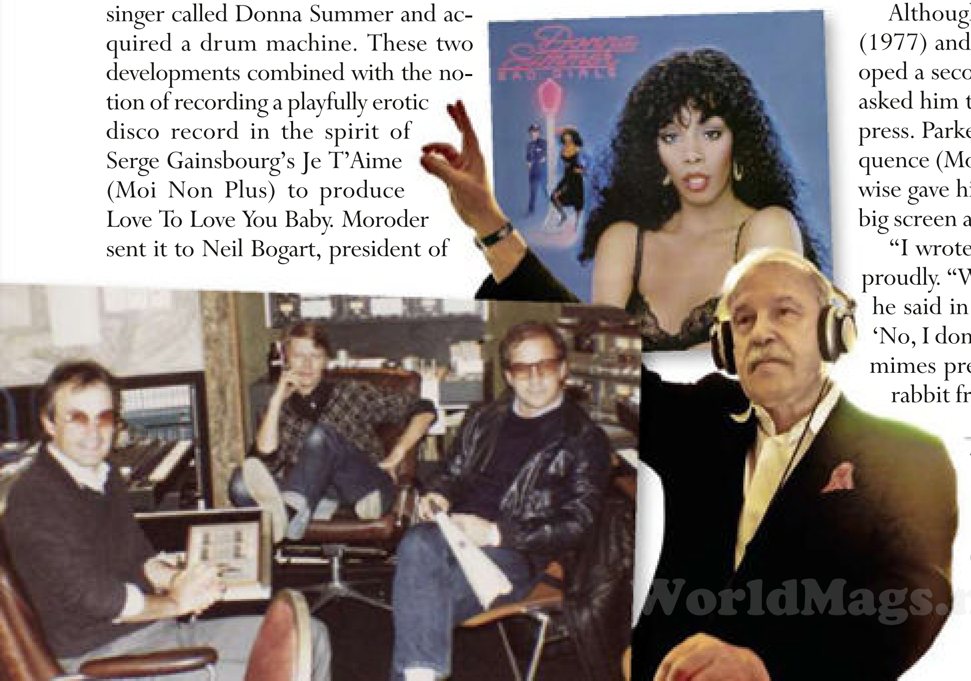
Machine music had never sounded, in Bellotte's words, "so massive, so future-proof". Bowie, Eno and Nile Rodgers all heard the way forward in its sonic Escher staircases. Italo, trance and EDM proved them right.

When Summer moved to LA in 1978, Moroder and Bellotte followed. The alliance of two white European men and a black American woman was disco's dream team, with four Number 1 singles and seven hit LPs. Their 1979 masterpiece *Bad Girls* contained Eurodisco marvels like Sunset People and Our Love, whose drum pattern was copied by New Order on Blue Monday. As Kraftwerk were stately and deadpan, so Moroder brought sweeping drama, emotional extravagance and thrilling velocity to electro pop, his productions hi-tech fantasies of a grander, shinier world.

Summer's new label boss, David Geffen, replaced Moroder with Quincy Jones, but the producer was already moving on. "I liked what I did with disco but it was becoming a bit of a standard: the bass is that, the strings is that. I knew that I could do much better. I thought if I can do bubblegum and I can do disco then I can do something else, too."

Although his excellent solo albums *From Here To Eternity* (1977) and *$E=MC^2$* (1979) failed to take off, Moroder developed a second career in Hollywood after director Alan Parker asked him to score his lurid 1978 prison drama Midnight Express. Parker wanted something like I Feel Love for a chase sequence (Moroder obliged, to the letter, with Chase) but otherwise gave him free rein. The score brought synthesizers to the big screen and earned Moroder his first Oscar.

"I wrote the whole movie like whatever I wanted," he says proudly. "We mixed it in an afternoon. He loved what I did but he said in one scene can we get an oboe player? And I said, 'No, I don't have to get you a guy. I can give you an oboe.'" He mimes pressing a key and grins like a magician producing a rabbit from a hat.



"Oh Bowie! He's a darling!" (clockwise from left) Giorgio working on HARD Day Of The Dead, Day 2, Los Angeles, November 3, 2013; discussing Cat People with Bowie and Paul Schrader in Montreux, 1981; (top) with Ron and Russell Mael in 1979 for Sparks' *No.1 In Heaven* album; (opposite) on *Bad Girl* shoot with Donna Summer.

Film Magic, Courtesy of Giorgio Moroder (3)

MORODER FIRST CONSIDERED GIVING UP MUSIC in 1981, when he moved to New York to work on visual art. "I was not depressed but I was kind of tired," he says. "I wanted to do something else. Then Jerry Bruckheimer called me and said, 'Do you want to do a movie called Flashdance?' and I fell back into work like crazy."

Flashdance earned Moroder his second Oscar and his first two Grammys. He worked with Bruckheimer and his sometime partner Don Simpson on five movies, from American Gigolo (1980) to Top Gun (1986), spearheading the synergistic trend of promoting blockbusters with massive hit singles. He dealt with big money and big personalities. "Bruckheimer was the guy," he says. "He didn't take drugs, didn't smoke, I never saw him drinking. He was clean, attentive, he was there. Don Simpson came in full of drugs and left full of drugs. It was incredible. And Neil Bogart!" He rocks with delight, eyes widening. "We'll not even talk about him."

Moroder's maximalist, neon-bright productions were the acme of '80s excess. His 1983 Scarface soundtrack, enduringly popular with rappers, is basically audio cocaine. But Moroder was a Bruckheimer rather than a Simpson. He never touched the hard stuff. "I was the strange guy," he says. "I still think I'm the only one in the industry in Los Angeles who never did coke. I would work from noon to six or seven, then I would go home and the musicians would finish the song. Little did I know that that's when the party started and it went on 'til six in the morning. Oh God! Two or three ended up in rehab."

Moroder liked to work fast and leave the grunt work to his team. "I'm not a perfectionist," he says. For the theme to Paul Schrader's remake of Cat People, he met David Bowie for dinner in Montreux and they were in the studio the next morning.

"Oh Bowie, he's a darling," Moroder gushes. "So professional. He came in for breakfast at nine, we started at eleven and by one o'clock we were done. Paul Schrader said, 'No, no, it's not done! You cannot do a song in three takes because it takes me 15 takes on every scene.' But David and me said, it's done. Why would we do it again?"

For each movie, Moroder would write and demo a song with his own vocals and then cast the right singer: Blondie for American Gigolo's Call Me and (after Paul Young snubbed him) Berlin for Top Gun's Take My Breath Away. Both songs, like Irene Cara's Flashdance… What a Feeling, were US Number 1s. Some of his efforts, like Together In Electric Dreams with Phil Oakey and The Neverending Story for Limahl, were more memorable than the movies themselves. He admits to disappointments – a washout Janet Jackson album, a divisive all-star rescore of Fritz Lang's Metropolis – but his strike rate was formidable. "I think I'm quite good with melodies," he says. "The Italians have great melodies. What's really difficult is getting the best from a singer. I think my strength is probably to have them sing it the way I want. It's a lot of stress."

Moroder produced and co-wrote turbocharged hits for Sparks (The Number One Song In Heaven) and Japan (Life In Tokyo) and he could have done more. He turned down Duran Duran and abandoned sessions with a-ha after they spent the first day fighting. Then there was Bob Dylan. Sylvester Stallone wanted Dylan for the Rambo soundtrack and sent Moroder to the singer's Malibu home with a demo. "I never found out if he didn't like it or if it wasn't the right movie with all the political stuff." He shrugs. Easy come, easy go.

After Take My Breath Away (another Number 1, another Oscar), Moroder lost pop's pulse, along with any interest in finding it again. He'd spent enough time in recording studios already. "I thought, Oh God, I did so much music and it's always the same. I wanted to do something different." His only unrealised goal is a stage musical but, he says, "I don't go to the musicals because I don't like them. If you don't like them it's not easy to write something." Quite.

So it's surprising that he was tempted to make *74 Is The New 24* at all; even more so that he's approached it with such gusto. You might think that at this stage any further success would be a bonus.

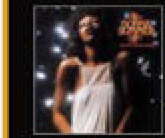
"No it's not a bonus, it's an ambition!" he says. "I never had a Number 1 song as a singer or as an act – never as Giorgio Moroder." The possibility makes him smile. "Now I may have a chance." Ⓜ

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

TEN ECSTATIC HIGHS FROM THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF GIORGIO MORODER. BY CLIVE PRIOR.

1 LOVE TO LOVE YOU BABY

(from Love To Love You Baby, Oasis, 1975)



Banned by the BBC, hailed by Time magazine as "a marathon of 22 orgasms", it started here, Summer reimagining Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin's Je T'aime… Moi Non Plus as an autoerotic solo outing, turned into an intense slow-burn disco epic by Moroder.

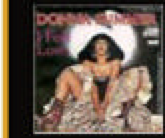
2 KNIGHTS IN WHITE SATIN

(from Knights In White Satin, Oasis, 1976)

The roots of I Feel Love are heard in this side-long disco reworking of The Moody Blues' 1967 hit. With its melancholy Kraftwerk mid-section, and lyrics delivered as sinister giallo monologue, the track was the blueprint for much of Yello's steel-and-glass '80s disco.

3 I FEEL LOVE

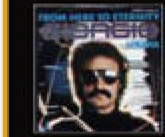
(from I Remember Yesterday, Casablanca, 1977)



The sound of pop music stripped to its basic essentials – rhythm and sexuality – I Feel Love still sounds both thrillingly primitive and chillingly futuristic, the cold pulse machine prototype for everything from post-punk to Detroit minimalism.

4 FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

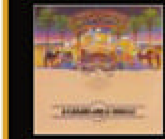
(from From Here To Eternity, Casablanca, 1977)



Here Moroder pushes his I Feel Love gameplan to the furthest limits of dancefloor euphoria. Threatening to topple into breathy self-parody, the serious intent is maintained by the relentless metallic rhythms and constant reach for new states of emotional ecstasy.

5 CHASE

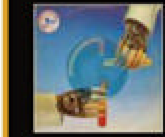
(Casablanca 12-inch, 1978)



Written for the soundtrack to Alan Parker's Turkish prison drama Midnight Express, Chase was released as a 12-inch 13-minute maxi single that pushed the Moroder sound further into the future, blending the melodic naivety of library music with cold, hard proto-techno rhythms.

6 TRYOUTS FOR THE HUMAN RACE

(Elektra 12-inch, 1979)



The entirety of Sparks' LP collaboration with Moroder, *No. 1 In Heaven*, is gloriously spaced-out pop elation, but few albums start in a more blissful fashion. The first single off *No. 1…*, this 12-inch (and accompanying video) is a dizzying blend of *Diabolus in musica* synthesizer and Russell Mael's falsetto fairy tale about the fate of two sperms.

7 CALL ME

(Chrysalis single, 1980)

A great example of Moroder's ability to hide in plain sight as a producer of '80s pop singles. In contrast to the upfront machine groove of his '70s authored tracks, Call Me uses trademarked techniques and inventions – marching synth rhythms, peaking female sighs, that Evolution guitar riff – in the service of Blondie's new wave pop cool.

8 CAT PEOPLE

(MCA 12-inch, 1982)

DAVID BOWIE

Was this Moroder fitting himself around Bowie, or Bowie tailoring his lyrics to the dark metallic patterns of Moroder's backing track? Either way, it's one of the Dame's most quietly impressive numbers, creating a sonic mood board completely in tune with the doomy atmospheres of such '80s goth outfits as Bauhaus and Sisters Of Mercy.

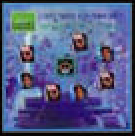
9 TONY'S THEME

(from Scarface OST, MCA, 1983)

Namechecked by the Pixies and sampled by Mobb Deep, Kanye West and The Geto Boys, this sinister clanging chorale has also had a vast influence on the doomy distressed sound of such modern club labels as Tri Angle, Blackest Ever Black and Pan.

10 TOGETHER IN ELECTRIC DREAMS

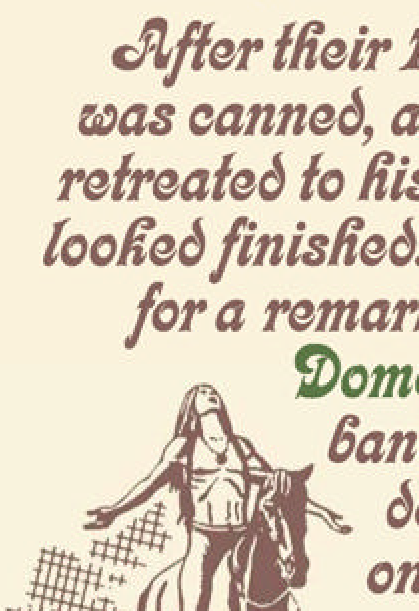
(Virgin 12-inch, 1984)



The flipside to the Stygian doomsynths of Scarface and Cat People was to be found in Moroder's post-Blondie '80s pop work, perhaps best exemplified by this sugar-sweet Euro candy written with The Human League's Oakey for the now forgotten US sci-fi comedy drama, Electric Dreams.

O Brother, where art thou?

After their 1967 masterpiece Smile was canned, and their chief songwriter retreated to his room, The Beach Boys looked finished. Instead, they regrouped for a remarkable run of '70s albums. Domenic Priore speaks to the band about their decade of democratic creativity and, on page 70, Tom Doyle meets Brian Wilson to hear about a new biopic.



Portrait by Lester Cohen.

Getty Images

The Beach Boys

ON APRIL 25, 1967, CBS News broadcast Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution, a documentary hosted by New York Philharmonic maestro Leonard Bernstein. The programme analysed the recent wave of sophisticated music coming out of “the youth movement”, from The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and others. Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys was filmed for the end summary performing a new collaboration with Van Dyke Parks called Surf’s Up, a plea for the establishment to listen to the sociological concerns of the coming generation.

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE
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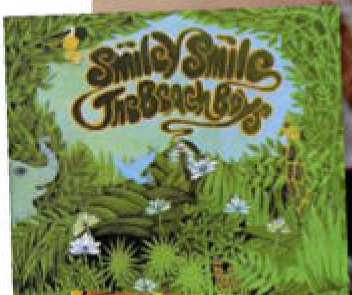
5706
THE BEACH BOYS

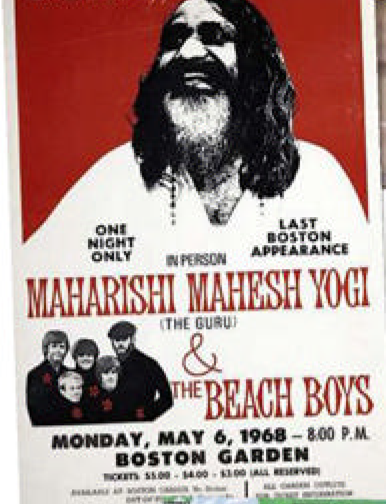


WILD HONEY
THE BEACH BOYS

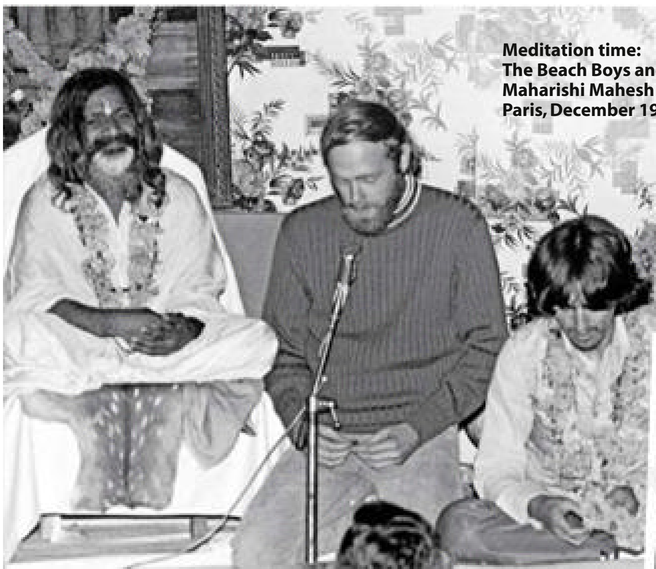
“Poetic, beautiful, even in its obscurity,” went producer David Oppenheim’s narration, “Surf’s Up is one aspect of new things happening in pop music today. As such, it is a symbol of the change many of these young musicians see in our future.”

Surf’s Up was to have been the keynote track on an album called *Smile* that never came to be. Taking off from the modular songwriting concept pioneered on lead single Good Vibrations, *Smile* would shift from minimalist to grandiose, farmyard to swelling ocean, geography and spirituality visualised in sound that flowed seamlessly via music cut in a variety of Hollywood’s finest soundtrack studios.

The Beach Boys had come a long way from the surf-beat sound that had defined their US chart presence since 1961, and Capitol Records feared the group’s maturity would signal a significant tail-off in their fortunes. Ironically, 1966’s *Pet Sounds* had produced a double-sided summer single with Wouldn’t It Be Nice and God Only Knows in America as well as a Number 3 in Sloop John B and a Number 32 for Caroline, No (released as a Brian Wilson solo single). One reason behind this new-found maturity was pharmaceutical.



FRIENDS / THE BEACH BOYS

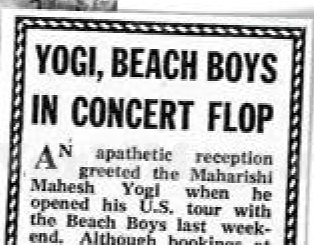


Meditation time: The Beach Boys and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Paris, December 1967.

“CHEMICALS HAD A PROFOUND effect,” explained Carl Wilson in 1975. “Grass allowed people to loosen up, hear things differently. Brian [first] experienced LSD during ’65. Then we really got into the recording experience, and Brian especially did, into production, and making an album to be something to listen to as just one record. *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)*, was the first in that direction. *Rubber Soul* was around that same time. Then it really opened up.”

As Good Vibrations hit Number 1 in the UK and US during November 1966, Capitol put their full support behind the group for the last time, paying for bundles of *Smile* studio time. That creative momentum ended when The Beach Boys sued Capitol for back royalties in March 1967 in an attempt to start their own label, Brother Records. Then Brian lost confidence in his own creativity.

The fate of follow-up single Heroes And Villains hung in the balance while Capitol and group came to a legal agreement: Brother Records distributed by Capitol. It was a false dawn that left the group tattered, cancelling their Monterey Pop appearance that June, and forgoing *Smile*’s ethereal soundscapes. “Surf’s Up never came out on an album,” Brian told The History of Rock radio special in 1969. “It was supposed to come out on *Smile*, and that and a couple of others were junked. The group nearly broke up for good after that.”



YOGI, BEACH BOYS IN CONCERT FLOP

AN apathetic reception greeted the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi when he opened his U.S. tour with the Beach Boys last weekend. Although bookings at

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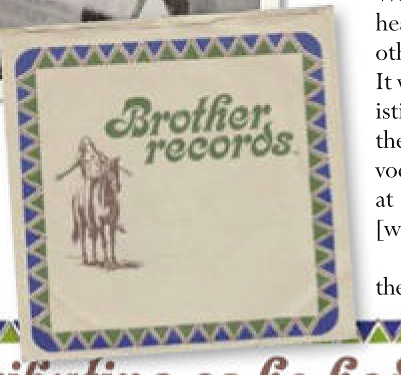
Don't let the sun go down: (from left) Blondie Chaplin, Bobby Figueroa (partly hidden), Dennis Wilson, Ricky Fataar (on drums), Al Jardine, Carl Wilson (partly hidden), Mike Love, Elton John, Crystal Palace Bowl, June 3, 1972; (below) Vegetables man Brian Wilson at the Radiant Radish, 1970.



Heroes And Villains was finally released in truncated form on July 24, 1967, reaching 12 in the US. In the wake of *Smile*'s fallout the group needed to record some "music to cool out by", according to Carl Wilson, and moved their recording operations from Hollywood to a home studio at Brian's new pad on Bellagio Drive in Bel Air. After the multilayered Heroes and Good Vibrations, their next LP, *Smiley Smile*, was an exercise in sublime minimalism; but with Jimi Hendrix breaking that summer at Monterey Pop, the incongruity couldn't have been clearer. The other noticeable change was a label credit. Instead of "Produced by Brian Wilson" was the more egalitarian "Produced by The Beach Boys".

The band removed themselves from the production race. By the end of 1967 (back on Capitol, not Brother), they'd released another minimalist effort, *Wild Honey*.

"Brian was not contributing as he [had] in the early hit-after-hit days," explains Bruce Johnston, a touring member of the group since 1965, but first credited as a band member on *Wild Honey*. "We still had to deliver albums to Capitol because of our re-negotiated contract. All of us began to have our songs appear on the albums to make up for less Brian-originated songs."

This collective approach didn't lead to many hits (Darlin' reached 19 in the US), but the group's inherent warmth glowed on *Wild Honey*, epitomised by the breezy charm of Country Air. "That was an environmentally sensitive tune," says Al Jardine. "We were into the health kick. Brian had his health food store, The Radiant Radish, in West Hollywood and we were all very health conscious. We poked fun at each other a lot; how we looked, how we felt. It was all self-centred [but] kind of altruistic too. We really were concerned about the environment. We did the Country Air vocals at Brian's house [and] the tracking at [Wally Heider's] studio in Hollywood [which] we owned a percentage in."

The band's gears seemed solidly reset as they entered 1968, but an odd devel- ➢

> "Brian was not contributing as he had done in the early hit-after-hit days. But we still had to deliver those albums to Capitol." Bruce Johnston

> "We were not competing with ourselves, like with Good Vibrations and Pet Sounds. It was a more relaxing songwriting era." Al Jardine

< opment within their collective character was already taking shape; their best material was being left in the can. Brian had last worked on *Smile* on June 7, 1967, recording the first Cool Water chant. Then on July 25, Capitol distributed a memo alluding to the album's release. Can't Wait Too Long, a rambling trance of vocalising to rich, vibraphone backing, was cut at Wally Heider's on October 28, with overdubs for the first movement of The Water Suite finished the previous day. The Beach Boys were also polishing off an interesting "live album" there, *Lei'd In Hawaii*, which made it all the way to sequencing, *sans* fake crowd noise, before being canned. And from this point, there were no more Capitol memos referencing *Smile*.

Brian later brought the Can't Wait Too Long tapes back to his home studio, and with outside musicians got them to a nearly-complete state in July 1968. That summer, he also made a private home recording of Sail Plane Song, achieving *Smile* trippiness with just piano and sound effects. With further work, The Water Suite would be released as *Sunflower*'s Cool, Cool Water in 1970.

Recording of the next album, *Friends*, began at Brian's Bel Air home studio in February '68. On tracks like Be Here In The Morning and Busy Doin' Nothin', Brian moved away from homespun minimalism, melding *Wild Honey*'s warmth with a complete universe of cosmic consciousness. *Friends* was also The Beach Boys' meditation LP. All the group had sat with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Mike Love had just returned from the Maharishi's Advanced Meditation session with The Beatles in Rishikesh, northern India. A minimalist masterpiece, *Friends* was dubbed "my favourite Beach Boys album" by Brian. "The material was well written," he explains today, "and the arrangements were very elegant."

Sadly, it was also the last complete statement from a Brian still in great voice, with all artistic capabilities at 100 per cent. *Friends* only peaked at 126 in the US, but in the UK it reached Number 13, the start of the group's US/UK popularity gap.

Brian's '68 output – I Went To Sleep, Ol' Man River, Sail Plane Song, Can't Wait Too Long – was consistently high, with many tracks, like We're Together Again, Soulful Ol' Man Sunshine and a cover of Rod McKuen's English-language adaptation of Jacques Brel's Le Moribond, Seasons In The Sun, left in the vaults. "[Seasons] was produced by Terry Jacks, with whom Alan Jardine had a relationship," explains Mike Love. "Carl sang lead but didn't like how it turned out, so out of respect of Carl's feelings, we didn't pursue it as a single. Taking each member's feelings into consideration was important."

Terry Jacks took his arrangement and had a huge solo hit with it in 1974.

One advantage of this egalitarianism was the group's new democratic songwriting approach. Dennis contributed Little Bird and Be Still to *Friends*; both co-written with poet Stephen Kalinich, whose 1969 arty soundscape album, *A World Of Peace Must Come* was co-produced by Brian (Kalinich would provide lyrics to 1974 Beach Boys outtake, California Feelin'). Mike Love garnered four Friends co-writes, Carl Wilson two, Al Jardine five.

"During that time, we were pretty much hanging out at Brian's Bel Air house and weren't very punctual," remembers Jardine. "Not everybody was at the studio when they were supposed to be, so Brian and I would wait around in the living room. There was a piano there and we'd be talking about stuff like, 'Wake the world with a brand new morning' [while] waiting for everybody! But it was just fun to have some quality time with Brian. He was into it and I was into it. Some of those songs, like Friends, involved all of us writing. We were not competing with ourselves like [with] Good Vibrations and Pet Sounds. It was a more relaxed songwriting era."

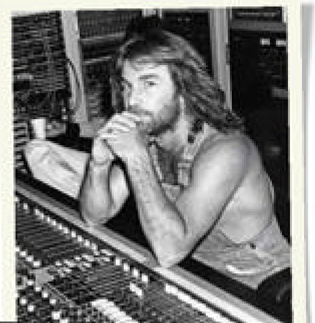
There remained a problem. With the group contracted for one more album, they and Capitol had grown weary of one another. Having negotiated a deal for Brother as a subsidiary of Warner Brothers/Reprise, the band began recording tracks at Hollywood's Gold Star studio for their Warner Brothers debut on Capitol's dime, simultaneously amassing a backlog of unreleased tracks to meet old Capitol contract obligations.

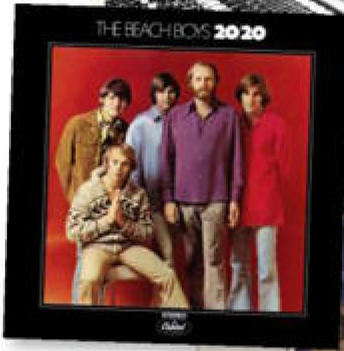
A vault tape titled 'Last Capitol Album' contains such *Sunflower*-related titles as Forever, All I Wanna Do, Deirdre, Got To Know The Woman, San Miguel, Loop De Loop and Break Away, while Brian and Mike pulled together an old-fashioned back-to-the-surf Beach Boys song, Do It Again.

Along with The Mothers Of Invention's doo wop tribute *Cruising With Ruben & The Jets*, and the Fillmore residency of rock'n'roll nostalgia act Sha Na Na, Do It Again heralded the early '70s rock'n'roll revival and took The Beach Boys back to the higher end of the charts. Yet there was no immediate follow-up. Instead, the group assembled older things for the Capitol release, *20/20*, including cast-offs from the *Friends*-era (I Went To Sleep) and *Smile* (Our Prayer, Cabinessence). Dennis contributed Be With Me and All I Want To Do, Al Jardine worked with Brian on a version of Cottonfields, while Bruce Johnston delivered melancholy instrumental The Nearest Faraway Place and Time To Get Alone, assembled from a backing track for Brother artists Redwood who, due to label frictions, had moved on in 1968, and were now Three Dog Night.

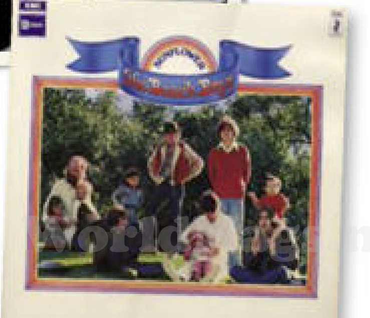
"The only letdown of The Beach Boys' career, that embarrassed me through and through, was *20/20*," Dennis told WNEW's Pete Fornatale in 1976, "because it was the first album the group made that was completely disjointed. We had to find things that Brian had worked on, and try and piece it together. That's where there was no involvement at all."

After working on a *Friends*-style medley of Old Folks At Home/Ol' Man River in May '68, the group suffered a major setback when Brian committed himself to a psychiatric hospital. He was back in the studio within the month, and seemed sufficiently rested by March 31, 1969, to work on the final Capitol single, Break Away, but be- >





STEPHEN JOHN KALINICH
A World Of Peace Must Come



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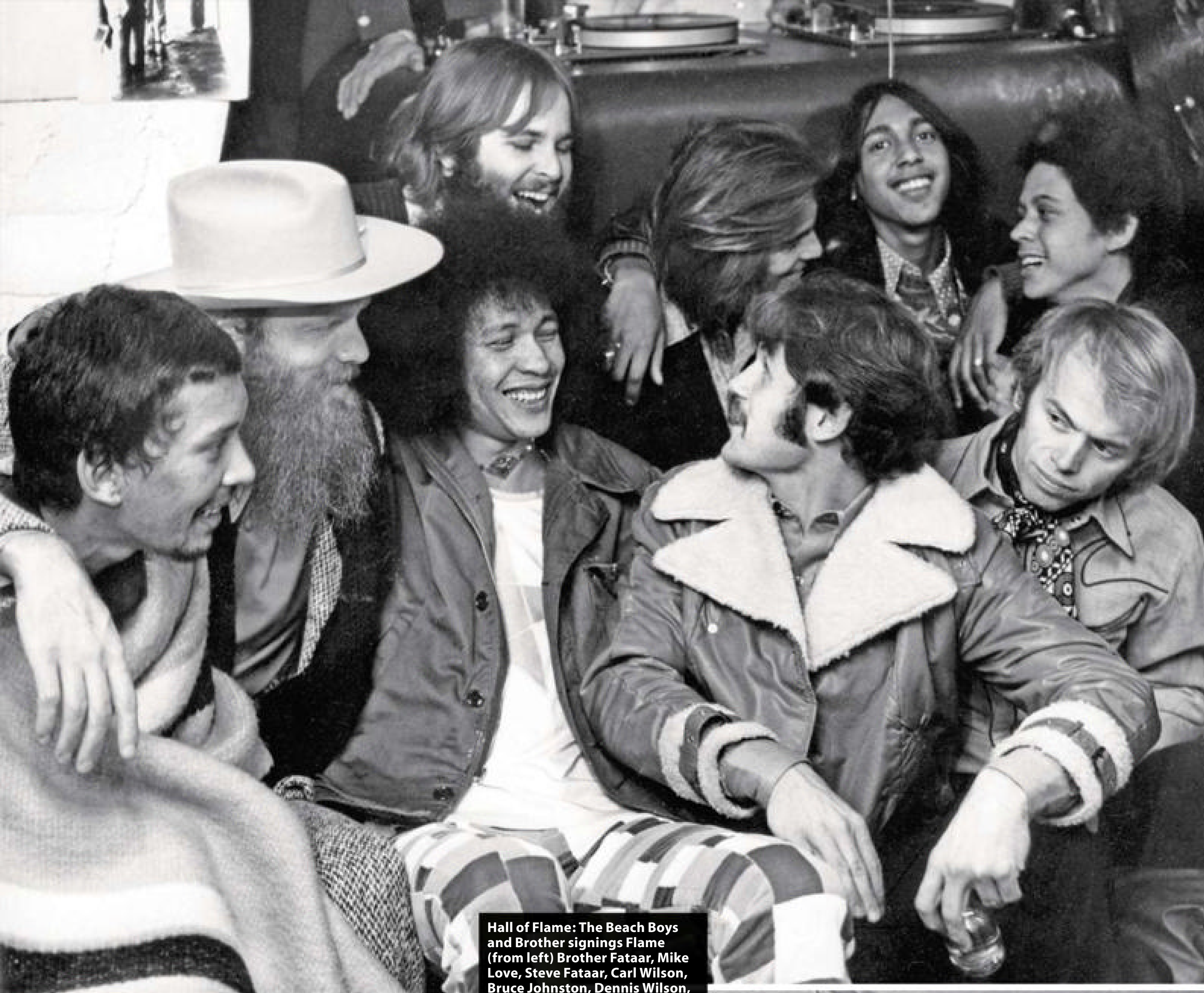
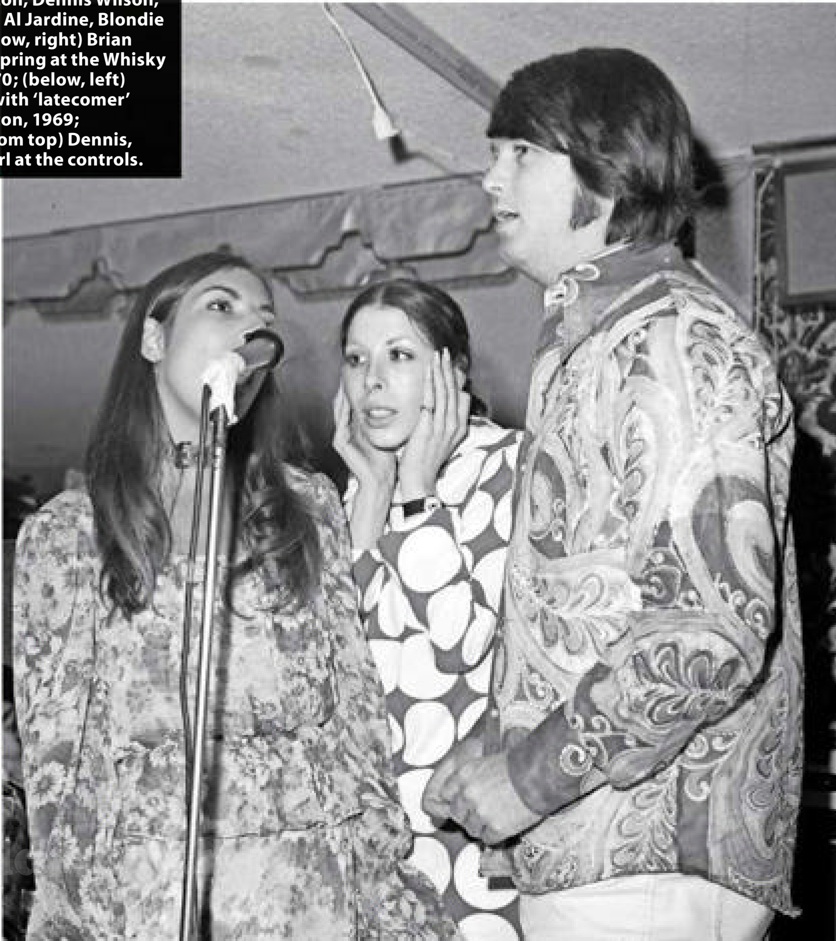


Hall of Flame: The Beach Boys and Brother signings Flame (from left) Brother Fataar, Mike Love, Steve Fataar, Carl Wilson, Bruce Johnston, Dennis Wilson, Ricky Fataar, Al Jardine, Blondie Chaplin; (below, right) Brian Wilson and Spring at the Whisky A Go-Go, 1970; (below, left) Beach Boys with 'latecomer' Bruce Johnston, 1969; (opposite, from top) Dennis, Brian and Carl at the controls.



Brian is back! (clockwise from top) Mike, Al, Carl, Brian and Dennis promote *15 Big Ones* in July 1976; (opposite, bottom) the burgermeister: Brian with Dr Eugene Landy, 1977.

“Sail On Sailor was a tough moment for Brian and me. I went over to his house to see how he was... He wasn't in good shape.” Van Dyke Parks

came a more reserved participant from this point onwards.

Other band contributions counteracted Brian's new reticence, and engineer Stephen W. Desper provided the group with an expansive stereo sound for the first time. Previously, Brian had recorded in mono, with *Friends* having a more basic 8-track stereo mix overseen by Carl. The group jumped to 16-track when they installed a new studio in Brian's home during October 1969 and assembled more than enough material for a double album. Brian's This Whole World, Dennis' Forever and Brian and Mike's All I Wanna Do were included on the next long-player, *Sunflower*, while Brian's 'Til I Die and two Al Jardine numbers were held over for *Surf's Up*. Further out-takes such as Brian's Good Time and Dennis's San Miguel would turn up on 1977's *Beach Boys Love You* and the 1981 Warner-era compilation *Ten Years of Harmony*.

“*Sunflower* is a great example of the band beautifully shining, along with some really great tracks masterminded by Brian,” holds Bruce Johnston. “It's my favourite Beach Boys album.”

Despite its strengths, *Sunflower* peaked at 151 in the US (faring better at 29 in the UK). For a band who'd mentally regrouped, it was a major disappointment. They didn't know what to do next.

Fortunately, during an interview for LA's liberal Pacifica Radio station KPFK in 1970, Brian met DJ Jack Rieley, who convinced the group to plunge into the early '70s counterculture, something they'd never exploited despite *Smile*'s ecological themes, Carl's registration for conscientious objector status in the Vietnam draft and the group's involvement with Transcendental Meditation. As their new manager, Rieley took these elements and reminded underground radio stations and the rock press that The Beach Boys had been aware all along. Then he pulled his major coup when he got Brian to agree to finally release *Surf's Up*.

JACK RIELEY GAVE THE BEACH Boys a second chance. As well rebranding the band in the America of the early '70s, he inspired band members to write about their concerns, with the artiness they'd left behind for simplicity after *Smile*. The results were Carl's best moments, as he took full leadership of the band.

As well as Surf's Up and 'Til I Die Brian, contributed the plaintive A Day In The Life Of A Tree. Carl brought in Long Promised Road and the exquisite Feel Flows – a fuzzy guitar groove in which TM friend Charles Lloyd laid down jazzy flute jams – and Bruce Johnston penned the wistful Disney Girls (1957). Even Mike Love's rewrite of The Robins' Riot In Cell Block #9, Student Demonstration Time, garnered healthy FM airplay. The LP charted at Number 29 in the US.

But Dennis, the most prominent contributor to *Sunflower*, refused to include his two *Surf's Up* compositions – Fourth Of July and Wouldn't It Be Nice To Live Again – because of a management dispute about the latter track closing the album. Recently cast opposite James Taylor as The Driver in Monte Hellman's existential road movie Two Lane Blacktop, Dennis was going through a personal renaissance, recording strange ethereal songs filled with wonder, bravado and sincerity. A solo single Sound Of Free coupled with Lady, was released in Europe, and there were tons of tape in the can, non-commercial compositions labelled 'D & D' for 'Dennis and Daryl', his keyboard collaborator Daryl Dragon aka 'Rumbo'.

“I stopped being competitive,” Dennis told KHJ disc jockey Robert W. Morgan in an undated '70s interview. “Making it is the fun part. As far as the critical acclaim or sales… I don't care.”

Two exquisite Dennis songs, Cuddle Up and Make It Good, wound up on the group's next album, revealingly titled *Carl & The Passions: So Tough*. De facto bandleader during the Jack Rieley era, in 1972 Carl added two members of South African Brother signings The Flame to The Beach Boys' stage and recording line-up. When Dennis damaged his hand after punching a sliding window during a 1971 domestic squabble, Mike Kowalski filled in for a while, then Flame's Ricky Fataar became The Beach Boys' drummer, allowing Dennis to stand on-stage and sing harmony.

Since Brian's stage departure in 1964, bass guitar had always been shared by band members. Now, Flame's Blondie Chaplin filled the role, his lead vocals a valuable new studio ingredient. A good creative fold solidified with *Carl & The Passions*… Yet, although it was cut at his home studio, and featured three of his songs, Brian was all but absent, just adding background harmony on his own songs, and piano on You Need A Mess Of Help To Stand Alone. Carl sang lead on You Need A Mess Of Help… and Marcella, but the surprise of the LP was the Mike Love/Al Jardine/Carl Wilson meditative collaboration All This Is That, which harked back to the beauty of 1964's She Knows Me Too Well. “That was a result of Alan and myself completing a TM teacher-training programme,” explains Mike. “The chorus is from ancient vedic scriptures 'I am that, thou art that, all this is that…' meaning 'we are all one'. We all embraced that message.”

Early '70s concert tapes reveal a strong live band, particularly Blondie Chaplin's lead on 1967's soul music workout Wild Honey, and Mike Love's improvisational Theremin jamming. However, Brian was spending more time in his bedroom, and when the mood struck, walking downstairs to record demos that he'd then hide from the group.

Bruce Johnston, who'd left the group around the time Blondie and Ricky came in, became one of a clique of insiders along with Terry Melcher, Tandyn Almer and Van Dyke Parks who'd visit Brian's Bel Air house while The Beach Boys were on the road, to hear him play the new numbers. Melcher referred to this as Brian's “Aesop” period, because hearing these songs, was akin to hearing Aesop tell his latest fable. Van Dyke Parks recalled one of these rough demos from 1971, and did the hard work as a Warner/Reprise employee, getting Brian to finish it as Sail On Sailor. “That was a tough moment for Brian and me,” says Parks. “I went over to Brian's house to see how he was, and he wasn't good. I went with my new Walkman, told him the name of the tune, and sang those intervals, and he pumped out the rest.”

During this time, Brian was also holed up with David Sandler, his ➢

Stateside
45
SOUND OF FREE
DENNIS WILSON AND RUMBO
So Tough

Getty Images, Mark Sullivan/Cache Agency

"It was quite a thrill"

On the eve of a new Brian Wilson biopic the man himself speaks to Tom Doyle about the highs and lows of seeing your life re-enacted by others, in close-up, on the big screen.

DECEMBER 23, 1964, somewhere between Los Angeles and Houston, Brian Wilson suffered the mid-flight panic attack which was to end his performing career for six years and terrify him enough to make travel problematic for far longer.

It's a scene which features briefly, if intensely, in Love & Mercy, the upcoming Wilson biopic which cuts between the 1960s and the 1980s. Actor Paul Dano, playing the young Brian, suddenly collapses, hyperventilating, into the plane's aisle, insisting, "I'm gonna die…"

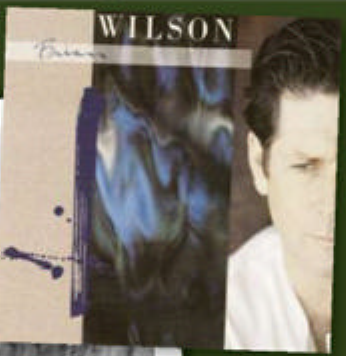
So it's obviously remarkable, here and now and just over 50 years later, for MOJO to meet Brian Wilson in 2015 in a suite in Berlin's Regent hotel on a cold winter afternoon. Having performed live only sporadically with The Beach Boys in the ensuing years, since 1999 he has taken to touring – both under his own name and as part of the surviving band – with something approaching enthusiasm. Or so it would seem.

Does he find he actually enjoys travelling around the world now? "Not really," he responds in his bluff, truncated manner. "I like the concerts but the travel days are rough."

An audience with Brian Wilson is a difficult affair, given both the lasting effects of his life troubles and the fact that he's now 72. He tends to offer stop-start responses and sometimes seems thrown by even the most straightforward enquiry. MOJO tries to avoid questions where he can reply with a blunt yes or no, but conversational flow is tough to maintain.

Ask him about the long gestation of Love & Mercy, though, which follows a couple of ropey, surface-skimming Beach Boys TV movies, and it's clear that it was made entirely with his involvement. "We worked on the script for 10 years," he explains. "We kept perfecting it and changing it 'til it was full, y'know."

In the film, Dano plays Wilson from the early days of the band to his creative "undoing" with *Smile*, while John Cusack tackles Brian in the 1980s (leading up to his eponymous return album in '88) when he was under the control of notorious psychologist Dr Eugene Landy – played with dramatic gusto by Paul Giamatti – and fogged by prescription drugs.



How is it, MOJO wonders, to see himself portrayed onscreen by not one, but two actors? "It was quite a thrill, to tell you the truth," he says. "It was Bill Pohlad [12 Years A Slave, The Tree Of Life] produced and directed it and he made sure that the craziness was cool."

In recreating the recording studio scenes involving the making of both *Pet Sounds* and *Smile*, Pohlad has gone to great lengths to nail both the intensive creativity and unhinged, dog-barking moments. Did those parts of the film depict the sessions as Brian remembers them? "Oh yeah," he cries, suddenly animated. "I said, Oh my God, I looked so energetic, y'know. And I felt depressed that now I'm 72 years old, right? So it made me remember the pep I used to have."

> "I haven't been able to finish a song for a long time." Brian Wilson

In one scene, confused Wrecking Crew bassist Carol Kaye has to enquire of the young Brian if she's right in thinking that he's written two basslines for Wouldn't It Be Nice, in two different keys. In another, drummer Hal Blaine declares Wilson to be more of a creative genius than his other paymaster, Phil Spector.

Did both incidents actually happen? "Yeah. But Hal was kidding. He was kidding…"

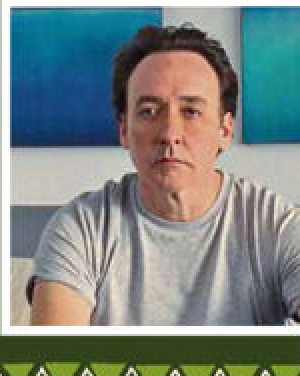
Meanwhile, MOJO understands that any mention of Eugene Landy tends to upset Brian (who said he was "devastated" when the psychologist died of lung cancer in 2006). But Love & Mercy openly documents the skyscraping highs and plummeting lows of Wilson's life, so it seems fair to ask him how he felt having to revisit them. "Well… some of it is like elation, y'know," he states. "And some of it is like a deep depression."

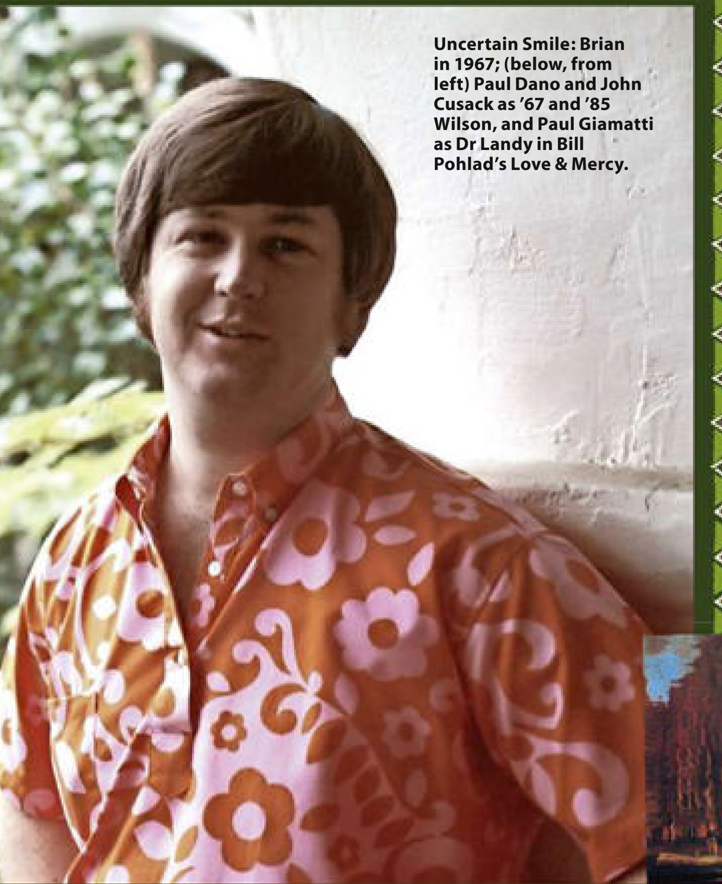
How many times has he watched the film? "Twice."

And that's it…you won't watch it again? "No."

Without Landy, arguably, the *Brian Wilson* album would never have been made. These days, though, the circumstances surrounding that solid comeback record appear to be mistier

Malibu stasis: Brian and Eugene Landy in California, 1983





Uncertain Smile: Brian in 1967; (below, from left) Paul Dano and John Cusack as '67 and '85 Wilson, and Paul Giamatti as Dr Landy in Bill Pohlad's Love & Mercy.

in Wilson's memory than even the far distant '60s. He was returning from a terrible period… recording technology had moved on… does he remember it being a tough re-entry into the music business?

"Uh," he falters. "I just remember getting up in the morning and writing songs. I went to my piano many times 'til I had the whole album written and then I proceeded to produce it."

Wilson has completed his 11th solo album, *No Pier Pressure*, which is due in April and features cameos from She & Him (Zooey Deschanel and M. Ward) and nouveau country singer Kacey Musgraves. "I like her stuff," he says of the latter. "She came down and she sang (*sings and snaps fingers*) 'Guess you had to be there'…"

No Pier Pressure was originally intended to be a Beach Boys album, the successor to 2012's *That's Why God Made The Radio*. But following Mike Love's announcement that year that the band's 50th anniversary tour would continue without Wilson – a statement made apparently without Brian's knowledge – it seems that the group's existence remains in doubt.

"Well they were all on tour," Brian says of *No Pier Pressure*. "We decided to keep it for us."

Does he still try to write songs every day? "No. I play the piano. I haven't been able to finish a song for a long time."

Why is he finding it difficult to finish songs? "I couldn't answer that question."

Is it still his constant striving for perfection? "Right."

If creatively blocked for the time being, he says his main source of musical inspiration these days is Paul McCartney, particularly his recent album, *New*, the title track of which featured distinctly Beach Boys-like harmonies. Strange to consider then, that half a century on, some of that old Beatles/Beach Boys rivalry and creative one-upmanship still exists. "Well we used to do that," he stresses. "We're not doing that any more."

But they're still very much friends, aren't they? When they hang out together, what do Paul McCartney and Brian Wilson talk about? "Not much," Brian breezily retorts, the hint of a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

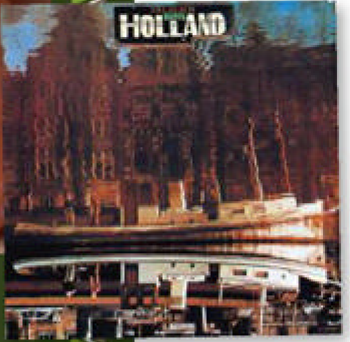
Love & Mercy is released in early June.

⮜ wife Marilyn and sister-in-law Diane Rovell making the Spring album. Marilyn and Diane were Spring, but Brian's high harmonies were a prominent feature, as if he were the third member of a girl group. Brian produced four numbers and laid down some of that "Aesop" material, also referred to as "The Bedroom Tapes".

As Al Jardine put it, Brian was becoming less "completion-oriented". In 1972, this took a hard turn against the group when a $40,000 advance was given to them for the release of *Smile*.

"It's good stuff, and it'll come out, eventually," Mike Love had told radio show Pop Chronicles in 1970. "We did continue to record, and we're going to come out with *Smile*… a fantastically-produced album."

Carl foraged to discover and catalogue what was in the tape vault on *Smile*, even leaking news of its imminent release, plus song titles. Then, on the eve of completion, Brian put the kibosh on the project. It was a bitter pill for Carl to swallow. *Surf's Up* had brought the group back to prominence and they'd won over live college audiences across America and Europe with a progressive post-*Pet Sounds* live repertoire. Brian was able to lay back and let Carl do the work, but a passive/aggressive resentment was building up as Brian watched his family and friends run off with the band. It was a gripe he seemed to register on *Holland*'s bonus EP, Mount Vernon And Fairway, a fairy tale about a Pied Piper who brings music to a young prince and his family, but disappears when the family stop believing in him.



Just as Carl had the band moving in a positive direction, Brian's *Smile* stalling created an adversarial relationship between Warner/Reprise and the group. Carl's resentment of Brian was only natural. Meanwhile, The Beach Boys were moving their home studio to Baambrugge in Holland for what would become their final album embraced by a progressive audience. For *Holland*, Carl delivered the magnificent The Trader, and Van Dyke Parks brought Brian's finished version of Sail On Sailor. "I wasn't going to originally sing Sail On Sailor," says Blondie Chaplin. "Dennis tried it and gave up, then Carl said, 'You want to sing it?' so I said, Fine. We got it on about two tries. That's what you hear on the record."

Al Jardine's California, also released as a single, became part of *Holland*'s ecology suite California Saga, with Big Sur, originally recorded during the *Sunflower* sessions in classic harmony mode, taking on a more folksy feel. "Maybe we were homesick recording *Holland*," says Mike Love. "But we decided to include California Saga. The trilogy starts with a poem I wrote inspired by Big Sur… driving from northern California through San Francisco searching for an alternate place to call home. I stopped in Big Sur and was completely blown away. I had to write about it. Ironically, Alan Jardine purchased the Big Sur ranch I'd considered. The second part of the trilogy, The Beaks Of Eagles, was written by Alan and Lynda Jardine [and] inspired by a Robinson Jeffers poem."

"That was like the homesick blues for us," concurs Al Jardine. "It kinda came out of my soul. But then the uplifting part, Brian brought that home beautifully. I said, Brian, can you put your part on this? He just walked right in, I don't think he even heard the track more than once, and he started singing 'On my way to sunny Californ-i-a.' Carl was hip to it, he played the most synthesizer on it. That was supposed to be the single but Warner Brothers didn't 'hear it'. So when we came home [we] recorded Sail On Sailor. You'll hear the difference, because the studio in Holland was desperately underwhelming in terms of professional recording."

The inclusion of *Surf's Up* and *Holland* tracks on 1972's "last surfing movie" Five Summer Stories perfectly equated The Beach Boys' early-'70s sound with a new wave of ecological concerns. For a moment, the band were at one with their times. "I lived in Holland for seven months," Carl reminisced. "I really felt like myself there, totally at ease and natural. We weren't very visible, we were just there, and that's very nice." ➤

Corbis, Getty Images

≺ On their return, after a summer tour, recording switched from Brian's house to the new Brother Studio at 1454 5th Street in Santa Monica, where they mixed *The Beach Boys In Concert*. With no new studio album in sight, the group's presence was reinforced through appearances on Charles Lloyd's T.M., Chicago's Wishing You Were Here, and Elton John's Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me.

As Brian's home demos were stockpiling, the band's concert receipts kept growing. They could now headline LA's Forum, home to Led Zeppelin, The Who and The Rolling Stones.

"The Beach Boys were a swinging live band," says Blondie Chaplin. "From 1971 to 1974 there was more of an edge, taking more chances. And that – in any band – makes things more interesting."

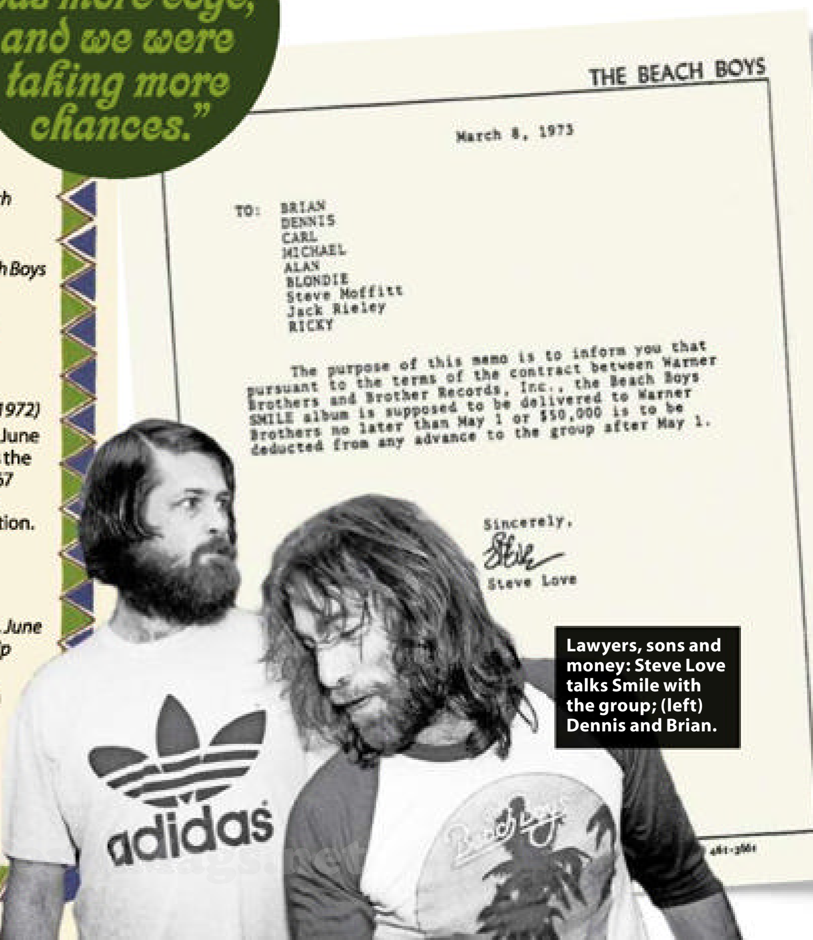
At the behest of James William Guercio (Chicago's manager), The Beach Boys reconvened for a new album at Colorado's Caribou Studios in the autumn 1974. They got started on Good Timin' and several other tracks but a fire in the control room ended this brief attempt at a new record. Back in LA, Brian laid down a shaky demo for California Feelin' at Western Studios, then, in early 1975, Terry Melcher, Bruce Johnston, Curt Boettcher, Gary Usher and others tried to get Brian into a studio for a production deal called California Music, basically a Brian Wilson training camp, paid for by Melcher's RCA-sponsored Equinox Records. "Terry and I loaned Brian our RCA/Equinox Records full royalty and budget," explains Bruce Johnston, "to give Brian a chance to be in the studio recording anything he wanted to without anyone second-guessing him. Sadly Brian was not in any kind of condition to properly use this gift."

Two singles were released with Wilson involvement, a collaboration with Boettcher called Jamaica Farewell being the most worthy. Brian hoped California Music would be a creative outlet, but wouldn't touch anything in the control booth, and Melcher was saddened to see Brian in such a bad way, unable to recognise his old musician friends.

The Beach Boys' new manager Stephen Love (brother of Mike) subsequently had Brian legally removed from the California Music project, using the Warner contract to render Brian's RCA production deal null and void. The group wanted Brian working for them, and steps were made to get him sober once and for all

BACK IN 1973, LOS ANGELES RADIO station KLOS had held a listener's poll, in which Surfin' USA beat Stairway To Heaven and A Hard Day's Night to Number 1. That year,

> "From 1971-74 there was more edge, and we were taking more chances."



THE BEACH BOYS

March 8, 1973

TO: BRIAN
DENNIS
CARL
MICHAEL
ALAN
BLONDIE
Steve Moffitt
Jack Rieley
RICKY

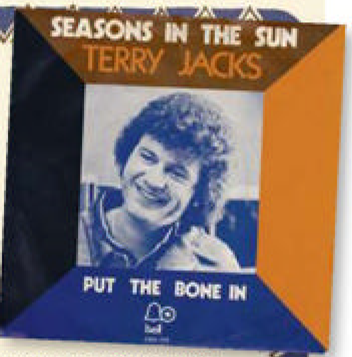
The purpose of this memo is to inform you that pursuant to the terms of the contract between Warner Brothers and Brother Records, Inc., the Beach Boys SMILE album is supposed to be delivered to Warner Brothers no later than May 1 or $50,000 is to be deducted from any advance to the group after May 1.

Sincerely,
Steve
Steve Love

Lawyers, sons and money: Steve Love talks Smile with the group; (left) Dennis and Brian.

The Great Lost Beach Boys LP

Domenic Priore picks 12 deep Brother-era cuts never on vinyl.



Water Suite

(1967)

Although assembled from the original Smile tapes, 2004's *Brian Wilson Presents Smile* conformed to the sequences of the 2003 live debut, not the original '67 order. As such, Water Suite was not ordered to its full effect, namely I Wanna Be Around/Workshop; Cool, Cool Water; ocean sound effects; Love To Say Dada.

Find it: *On the Smile box set; two of the four parts appear on Good Vibrations: Thirty Years Of The Beach Boys.*

Can't Wait Too Long

(1967-68)

Started by Brian in late 1967 at the same time he began to revisit Cool, Cool Water, this song shows a musician still capable of crafting the kind of ethereal dreamscapes he'd been writing for the band prior to the quirky minimalism of *Smiley Smile* and *Wild Honey*.

Find it: *Made In California, Smiley Smile/Wild Honey and Good Vibrations: Thirty Years Of The Beach Boys.*

Sail Plane Song

(1968)

Here again is Brian recording a trippy number, a child-like nursery rhyme about flying in an aeroplane, edged with an audible psychedelic unease and panic-attack hysteria. It evolved into *Sunflower* outtake Loop De Loop.

Find it: *Made In California, Endless Harmony Soundtrack*

We're Together Again

(1968)

This could be considered 'head' music, yet it comes out of the warmth of The Beach Boys' minimalist moment, haunted harmonic vocalising with a fuzzy outline, recorded just after *Friends* had been finished.

Find it: *Made In California, Friends/20/20*

Big Sur

(1969)

This beautiful Brian vocal arrangement on an edenic Mike Love lyric shows the two of them at the same serene peak achieved on *Sunflower*'s All I Wanna Do.

Find it: *Unreleased, but can be heard on YouTube, and found online on the Landlocked bootleg.*

Soulful Old Man Sunshine

(1970)

A writing and production collaboration between Rick Henn of The Sunrays and Brian. Jazzy hit potential here, with shades of soda-pop jingle rock and tons of great multilayered vocals.

Find it: *Made In California, Endless Harmony Soundtrack*

Seasons In The Sun

(1970)

Produced by Terry Jacks, just before the band dove into *Surf's Up*. He brought a logical sense to the use of a surf guitar sound in a late-'60s context, making the tone sound 'heavy'.

Find it: *Unreleased, but can be heard on YouTube.*

Barbara

(1971)

Dennis Wilson in the same California dreamer modality and space David Crosby was in when he released *If I Could Only Remember My Name* that same year. The cadenza at the end of Barbara may be Denny's finest moment.

Find it: *Endless Harmony Soundtrack*

California Feelin'

(1974)

Brian's rough-hewn demo from 1974 has an earthiness perfect for the band's direction during the first half of the decade. Two finished Beach Boy versions now exist, culled from '70s tapes.

Find it: *Made In California*

It's Over Now

(1977)

This plaintive *Adult/Child* song is most representative of a new maturity and perspective Brian was coming around to after the re-entry phase of *15 Big Ones* and *The Beach Boys Love You*.

Find it: *Made In California, Good Vibrations: Thirty Years Of The Beach Boys*

Bonus Tracks

Wild Honey

From Good Vibrations In London (1972)

Filmed at the Crystal Palace Bowl, June 3, 1972, Blondie Chaplin redefines the lead vocal on what had been a 1967 Beach Boy single, one never quite soulful enough for major chart action.

Find it: *YouTube*

California Girls

From NBC-4 New York's Speakeasy, June 1974 hosted by Woodstock MC Chip Monck

Mike Love, Charles Lloyd and John McLaughlin on a quasi-acoustic level bring the definitive 1965 Beach Boy hit into the mountains, where it transforms into a meditative drift.

Find it: *YouTube*

George Lucas' American Graffiti – tagline: "Where were you in '62?" – used The Beach Boys' All Summer Long over its end credits.

By the time American Graffiti's TV sitcom spin-off, Happy Days, first aired on January 15, 1974, America was deep into a pre-Beatles nostalgia trip and The Beach Boys were its default soundtrack. In '74-75, Capitol released two high-charting compilations, *Endless Summer* and *Spirit Of America*, both featuring material primarily from the group's early '60s albums.

DENNIS
WILSON
PACIFIC
OCEAN BLUE
THE BEACH BOYS
LOVE YOU

Happy days?: Brian, Wolfman Jack and Mike Love get nostalgic at the Easter Seals Telethon, March 25, 1979.

The band saw a chance, and late in 1975, Brian was sequestered with 24-hour therapist Eugene E. Landy and put to work producing a version of Chuck Berry's Rock And Roll Music for a nostalgia-tapping Top 40 hit in the American Bicentennial of 1976. Originally hired by Brian's wife Marilyn, Landy was fired after about a year because of escalating fees. He would come back into Brian's life in 1983, with controversial results, but at this stage Landy did get Brian off drugs and back working, though clearly in an artistically compromised situation.

"I said to Brian, We had such a big hit turning Sweet Little Sixteen into Surfin' USA, why don't we cover Rock And Roll Music?" explains Mike Love. "It hit the Top 5 on the Billboard chart."

Off the back of it, Warners initiated one of the biggest promotional campaigns of the decade – "Brian is Back" – for the first Beach Boys LP in over three years. Tagged as Brian's full return, *15 Big Ones* was, in fact, a bit of a sham. The LP was originally intended as a double, with one album of covers and another of new songs. A wealth of material was cut but Brian was not in good voice, which became obvious to the general public when he made a solo appearance on Saturday Night Live on November 27, 1976.

15 Big Ones-era recordings are an acquired taste; flippant things like Dennis's Sea Cruise or Billy Hinsche's spirited vocal over Brian's echo-laden Mony, Mony organ riff. "Brian was playing that big, white Baldwin organ," recalls Hinsche. "It looked like the Phantom Of The Opera organ [or] a 'from outer-space' organ. He used that, throughout that era. He just got fixated on it."

For the follow-up LP, *The Beach Boys Love You*, Brian resurrected songs from a demo tape often referred to as the "write-a-song, get-a-hamburger period", referencing one of Landy's ploys to get songs out of Brian. Quirky, with odd time-shifts, clever chords and often beautiful melodies, *The Beach Boys Love You* was another acquired taste. Brian's singing remained poor, and Roller Skatin' Child and Honkin' Down The Highway weren't songs any radio station would be playing soon; yet there was an endearing isolation to his compositions, Brian singing about outer space with the wonder of a child.

Next came the intriguing LP project *Adult/Child*, which harked back to the innocence and simplicity of *Wild Honey/Friends*; strong romantic statements like It's Over Now sitting next to covers of On Broadway and songs about getting fit, going to a baseball game and queuing for a movie. "[It is the] strangest album I've ever heard," said Dennis Wilson in 1977. "[Brian]'s vocals are the best I've ever heard him. I'm elated with the new album, it's really gonna be a surprise. I don't know where it's coming from, but it's positive, again."

Adult/Child was Brian working to regain his muse. Life Is For The Living, the opening track, returned to a 1964 collaboration with orchestrator Dick Reynolds and was pertinent to Brian's changing life; the former teen athlete writing about losing the weight gained during his years of seclusion, at a time when America was deep into the keep-fit/health food lifestyle he'd first championed on *Smile*. "My inspiration [for that album] was from my close friends like Van Dyke Parks and Tony Asher," explains Brian. "They were inspiring to me. And I proceeded to make the album that never came out." Frowned on by Reprise, *Adult/Child* was canned. There was also an unreleased Beach Boys Christmas album, and the first of three still-unreleased Mike Love solo albums, *First Love*.

As the Warner/Reprise relationship soured, in 1977 the group began courting CBS. A recent TV special produced by Lorne Michaels of Saturday Night Live had presented them in a progressive light, while Rolling Stone put the group on their cover for a second time since '71, but inside they were five democratic votes, based on the 1964 line-up. Dennis and Carl argued that the *15 Big Ones* direction was a dead end, and felt the group should return to the experimental sound canonised on 1973's live double *The Beach Boys In Concert*. Mike and Al voted for nostalgia. Brian's casting vote, possibly against his own best creative interests, went with Love and Jardine. After stymieing Carl's work on *Smile* in 1972, Brian had now inadvertently ended his brother's leadership of the group.

Ironically, in August 1977, without benefit of a tour, and created in the pure, artistic spirit of The Beach Boys' early '70s, Dennis Wilson's *Pacific Ocean Blue* broke the Billboard Hot 100. A year later, The Beach Boys' commercially engineered *M.I.U. Album* tanked at 151. "It's a hobby, a love, not a business ..." said Dennis, in 1977, explaining his artistic independence from the old group. "I'm sure Brian feels the same. [The Beach Boys] are no longer involved in the Top 40 race, or need to be. There are so many [Beach Boys] records sold every day [that] if we never make another they would continue to sell, as long as there's a record industry. We're over the hump that way."

But that was no longer the group's way. Their first CBS release, *L.A. (Light Album)*, produced by Bruce Johnston, had a few moments that harked back to *Surf's Up* and *Holland*, but overall tried and failed to assimilate late-'70s yacht rock and disco grooves. It was premiered in New York on March 1, 1979, the first of a four-night residency at Radio City Music Hall, where their new single, a disco reworking of *Wild Honey*'s Here Comes The Night, was roundly booed. Brian's Good Timin' was rushed out in its place, but the damage was done. *L.A.* only reached 100 in Billboard. The last time Dennis Wilson participated on a Beach Boys album, it was the end of an era, a decade that Brian Wilson now sums up as "like a roller coaster ride [that] ran the gamut, [from] balance to rock and roll."

"The real work for The Beach Boys came in those years," argues Bruce Johnston. "From the non-birth of *Smile* through to *Surf's Up*, Brian never disappeared altogether, but others had to take the wheel. Brian's hard times made the rest of us strong by default." Ⓜ

Brian Wilson tours the UK in September. Tickets from www.livenation.co.uk. His LP Not Pier Pressure is out now. Love And Mercy is in cinemas June 7. Special thanks to Alan Boyd, Brian Chidester, Betty Collignon, Becky Ebenkamp, Billy Hinsche, Al Jardine, Bruce Johnston, John Koch, Mark London, Mike Love, Paula Perrin, Peter Reum, Darian Sahanaja, Jean Sievers, Craig Slowinski, Ron Swart, Brian Wilson.

Getty Images (2), Gary Pig Gold

格雷厄姆
亚历克斯
达蒙
戴夫

Blur, The House Of St. Barnabas, London, February 19, 2015: (from left) Alex James, Damon Albarn, Graham Coxon, Dave Rowntree. "We have to leave it in a positive way, like *Abbey Road* did for The Beatles."

THE LAST BATTLE

THEY WERE LOVED, THEN HATED. THEN LOVED. THEN HATED, THEN LOVED AGAIN. THEY MADE A NOISE, DEFINED THE TIMES, FELL OVER AND FELL OUT, THEN KISSED AND MADE UP (SORT OF). BUT IN THEIR HEARTS **Blur** KNEW THAT SOMETHING WAS MISSING. THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW THEY FOUND IT.

WORDS: **Keith Cameron** / PORTRAITS: **Tom Oldham**

REGRETS? DAMON ALBARN SAYS HE'S GOT "many". But he'll only mention two today.

First, when Gorillaz headlined the Glastonbury Festival's Pyramid Stage in 2010. An eleventh hour replacement for Bono's injured back, Albarn's cosmic cartoon hip hop collective suffered on two counts, neither necessarily their fault. The audience wanted U2. Failing that, they might have settled for Blur, whose reunion had been the highlight of the previous year's Glastonbury. But for Gorillaz the atmosphere was flat, the crowd thinned out alarmingly, and Albarn believes he could have remedied the situation with one simple gesture.

"Why didn't I talk to the audience when I played Glastonbury with Gorillaz? Why didn't I communicate with the audience, at all? I regret that, because it would have been a different outcome if I had. The gig we did later at Roskilde I did talk to the audience and it was fantastic."

His second regret seems, in the big picture of Blur, quite trivial.

"I sort of regret that we didn't put Me, White Noise on *Think Tank*. I would much rather it had been on the record and Crazy Beat hadn't. That was one of the last times that I actually let outside influences affect what I put on a record. It's really cool and it should have been on but everyone was like: 'Oh, you can't put that on.' Bollocks. Of course we should have put it on.

"Anyway!" he says, brightening. "That's why you always move forward. You can keep learning from your mistakes."

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ME, WHITE NOISE IS ACTUALLY on *Think Tank*, albeit hidden as a prologue thanks to the digital chicanery in vogue at the time, revealed if the CD was rewound to -6.40. Listeners could only guess at the reasons behind such subterfuge. One possibility was that Me, White Noise didn't much resemble Blur at all: six and a half minutes of distorted electro beats, overdriven acid squiggle, splintered guitar, melodica and amorphous skronk, like Daft Punk covering The Pop Group. It featured actor Phil Daniels literally drunk out of his mind, reprising his Parklife geezer shtick but from the other side of fame's shattered looking-glass. "There's a lot of snides out there/Wanting to have a little pop at your life…" – the rambling monologue spoke to the curdled reality of what happens when all your dreams come true.

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By now, Damon Albarn had been the singer, songwriter, principal theorist and all-purpose motivator in Blur for nearly 15 years. Anyone viewing his band solely through the distorting prism of the mid-'90s Britpop boom could never have guessed at the soul-sapping lows and the sheer hard graft which had prefaced the band's success, or indeed the crushing anxieties that were the corollary of sudden and intense celebrity. Throughout it all, as others doubted and wobbled, Albarn clung steadfast to his vision, while also possessing enough flexibility and perspective to recognise when he'd been wrong: most notably that 1995's *The Great Escape*, although commercially expedient, represented creative stasis. Subsequently repurposing Blur into a vehicle for his increasingly introspective songwriting enhanced the band's artistic credentials without diminishing their popularity. As Oasis, arch-nemesis in the Battle Of Britpop, crashed and burned, Blur made their real great escape: into art.

Yet amid the liberation of 1997's *Blur* and 1999's *13*, Albarn also began to glimpse a world beyond the confines of a famous pop band. In 2000 he visited West Africa as an Oxfam ambassador and returned with 40 hours of recordings he'd made with local musicians in Mali. 2001 saw him unveil Gorillaz, an alias concept he'd been working on for two years that instantly reaped global success, prompting Blur's bassist Alex James to tartly question the singer's commitment to the band. Certainly, in 2002, as he spat out the chorus of Me, White Noise, Albarn appeared to have experienced some sort of critical revelation: "And then you move move move move/And you push push push push/And you trip over yourself and you think to yourself/Why am I here?/I'm here because *I've got no fucking choice!*" ➢

➢ On *Think Tank*'s 2012 reissue, Me, White Noise remained hidden, albeit now at the end, a few minutes after Battery In Your Leg, the official final track, which was also the only song on the album to feature Graham Coxon. The circumstances surrounding the exit of Blur's brilliant but troubled guitarist were indicative of the agonised state of the band's internal dynamic by that point. "I didn't quite know what had happened and I don't think Blur really knew," Coxon says now, almost exactly13 years later.

blur
leisure

On the day sessions were due to start at Albarn's west London Studio 13, Coxon entered a rehabilitation programme at The Priory. When he did eventually join his bandmates, the atmosphere was, according to producer Ben Hillier, "fairly poisonous". What happened next remains contentious. In an October 2002 interview to promote his new solo album, Coxon said he had been asked to leave by Blur's manager, Chris Morrison. Subsequent comments from band members muddied the picture. In the 2010 Blur documentary No Distance Left To Run, drummer Dave Rowntree stated that what they had asked Morrison to say to Coxon and what he actually had said were two different things. In the *Think Tank* reissue's sleevenotes, Albarn says it was he who asked Coxon to leave.

"All I knew was that one day I had a meeting with my manager," Coxon says, "and he said, 'The boys don't really want you to go to the studio at the moment.' You have to choose your words carefully when you're a manager telling somebody in a band this. If you say 'You're sacked', then you can find yourself under a whole load of shit. So I think he was very careful not to say that. He said it was very much for the time being. I thought, Well, if my wife says 'I don't want to carry on like we are and I don't really know until what point I'll be feeling this way…' I guess it was like that. So I got some advice and I thought: Oh, I'll chuck myself then… I took the leap myself. And I got on with my life."

Blur completed *Think Tank* as a trio, with sessions in a Marrakech riad and a barn on Albarn's Devon farm. Aside from the awkward Fatboy Slim-produced Crazy Beat, a self-conscious update of the Blur familiar to the man on the Clapham omnibus, the album reflected Albarn's burgeoning immersion in music rooted far beyond Blur's traditional UK-centric post-punk idioms. It was released in May 2003, to positive reviews. An accompanying world tour, however, with Simon Tong and Albarn fulfilling the guitar quotient, made the Graham-shaped hole in the band glaringly clear. "Touring was horrendous," Albarn says. "Painful. I didn't have a guitarist. I mean, I had a *great* guitarist, but not Graham. Playing any of the old stuff was *awful*."

Just before Blur slipped into dormancy, Me, White Noise saw its first official release, as a B-side, an alternate version sung by Albarn alone, featuring different verse lyrics delivered with menace: "You've let yourself down and you don't know why… Being English isn't about hate/It's about disgust/We're all disgusting…" By the end, he was screaming – "And furthermore, *furthermore* – you're BORING!" – like a man possessed. Which of course he was: by the firm belief that he would never make another Blur album.

LONDON IS WEARING ITS STEREOTYPICALLY GREY winter best this Monday morning. From the top floor meeting room of Studio 13, Damon Albarn has a choice of views. On one side, the ungainly urban scramble of North Kensington: housing estates, light industry units, a hospital, rail tracks, Wormwood Scrubs, the Westway. Towering cranes in the foreground allude to the area's latest building development. "A 30-storey red office block," Albarn notes. "There goes my view. And my light. Ah, never mind." On the other side, central London's landmarks are unmistakable, even in miniature. "Look!" Albarn suddenly points towards the BT Tower. "It's glowy! It's just started again, it hasn't been doing that for years."

(continued on page 81) ➢

"IT'S LIKE PINK FLOYD. LOAD OF SELF-OBSESSED

Tom Sheehan

EARLY BLUR! Danny Eccleston charts the rocky road between the end of Seymour to *Modern Life Is Rubbish* and beyond…

AS A FAN, YOU JUST THINK, WHAT A BICKERING OLD LADIES!" Graham Coxon

Young and foolish in Clerkenwell, London, 1991: "We were lucky to find each other."

Credit in here

new

BAGGY CHANCERS TO POP PROPHETS, BLUR'S ROAD FROM BAPTISM TO *MODERN LIFE IS RUBBISH* FLIRTED WITH CHAOS, CATASTROPHE AND THE CARDIACS. "THEY WERE HANGING BY A THREAD," DISCOVERS DANNY ECCLESTON.

PICTURE: ED SIRRS

IN MARCH 1990, 25 YEARS AGO this month, a band called Seymour breathed its last, and a band called Blur were thrust, mewling and puking, into the spotlight.

"I hated that name, Seymour," says Andy Ross, then of Food Records – the EMI-funded label who'd secured the signatures of this handsome, if ill-dubbed four-piece. "Sounded like a hairdressers."

The name change – effected after Food submitted a list of 20 alternatives and Seymour a selection of their own (rejected: The Government, Sensitive, Whirlpool) – was prophetic in a sense. Identity would become the theme of the group's rollercoaster apprenticeship. Who were Blur and what did they want?

"They were kind of a mixed bag," recalls Food head Dave Balfe, already a music biz veteran with chart form as keyboard player in The Teardrop Explodes and the manager of grebo nutter Zodiac Mindwarp. "They had this thing that we kind of stifled, then it emerged again later: this Cardiacs side, a Brechtian element, anti-commercial. About a quarter of their live set was like that."

Food's massive recent success with the dance-rock crossover of Jesus Jones suggested an acquaintance with the *Zeitgeist*, but Blur's early releases hedged their bets. Debut single She's So High – the highlight of their demo tape – was engagingly louche psych pop but its AA side, I Know, groped for something more flagrantly vogueish. Second single, There's No Other Way, went the whole hog. Pieced together with the aid of studio technology by Smiths producer Stephen Street – somewhat to the group's initial dismay – it may have marked the last gasp of 'baggy'. "They played it to me at Maison Rouge," recalls Balfe, "and halfway through the intro I said, Oh, this is a Top 10 record. It only happened to me two or three times in my career – that certainty."

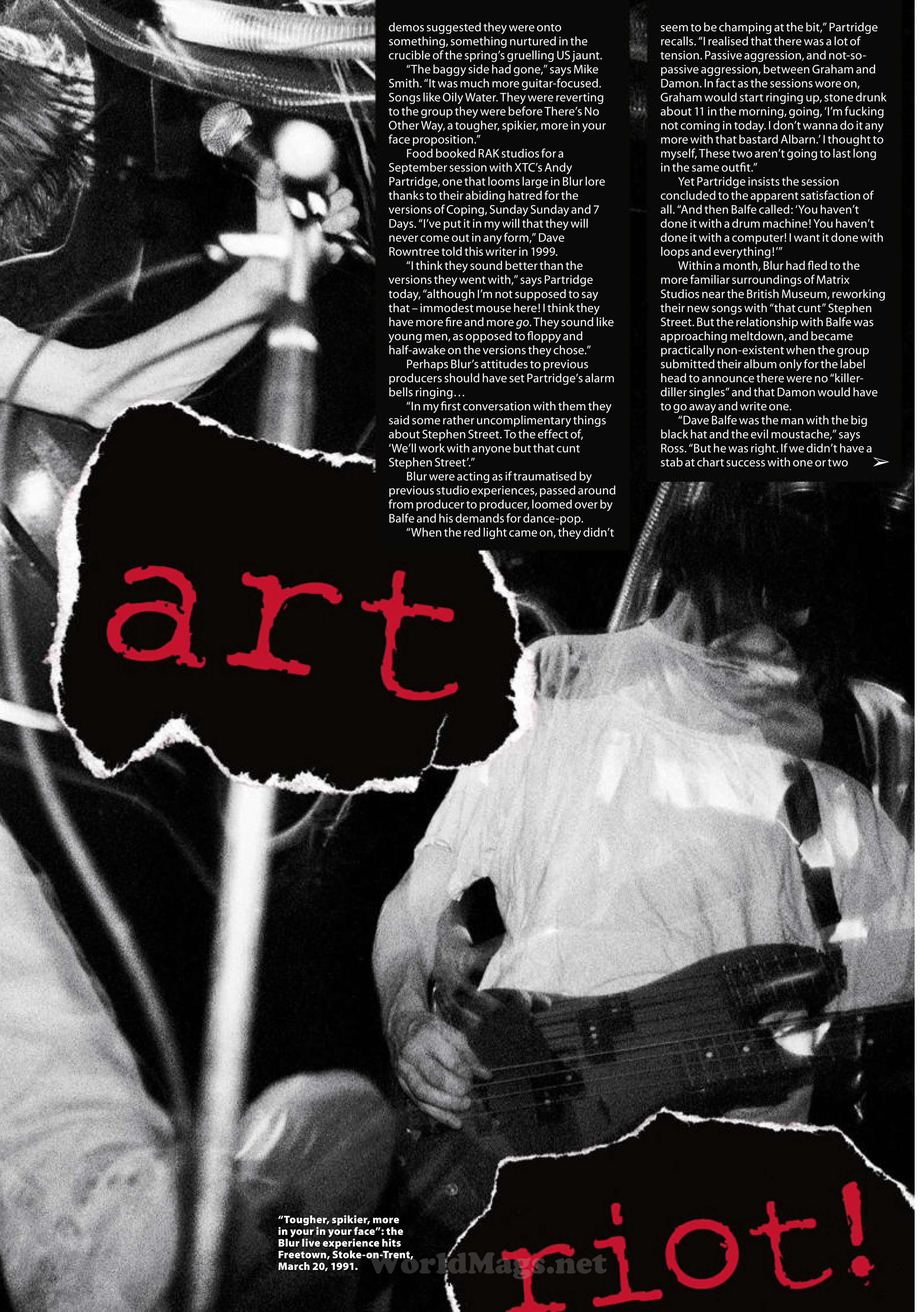
The single peaked at 8 in the UK, with *Leisure*, Blur's magpie of a debut album, destined to perform creditably in its wake. But Blur were already bridling at their label's obsession with dance beats. Catholic influences nurtured in cosmopolitan surrounds – Graham Coxon and Alex James at Goldsmith's College in New Cross, Albarn at East 15 drama school in Loughton – would out: XTC, Van Der Graaf Generator and Kurt Weill lined up against the forces of pop. "They liked the crazy, absurd side of music," recalls the man who would sign their publishing, Mike Smith, "like Spike Jones And The City Slickers. Alex had all these mad old records he'd inherited from his grandad."

Blur had foreseen the end of the baggy and shoegaze booms and would sound their death knell, or so they fantasised, with the punky spleen of their next single.

"Everyone had their hopes pinned on Popscene," recalls Andy Ross. "I was with the band in thinking it was a fantastic song. EMI were, to be fair to them, a bit more sceptical. But we were so confident that we had the follow-up – a song called Never Clever – ready to go."

Popscene's UK chart failure – Number 32 in April 1992 – burst Blur's bubble ("It was a case of re-evaluating everything," says Ross) and inaugurated a notorious 12 months in the history of the band. The shaken faith of EMI reverberated in worsening relations between Blur and Food. Meanwhile, Blur's manager Mike Collins, overwhelmed by the affairs of a booming band, did a bunk, exposing a hole of £60,000 in their finances. "Stupid of him, because I don't think the situation was irretrievable," reckons Balfe today. "Everyone liked him so much."

THE CURE NEARLY KILLED BLUR. New manager Chris Morrison and accountant Julian Hedley plugged holes with an advance on a merchandise deal that required Blur to undertake a 44-date tour of the States marked by desperate drinking and intra-band fisticuffs. Returning to the UK in June they found interest in the group flatlining, a burgeoning rival in Suede, grunge everywhere. There was a terrible charity show at London's Town & Country Club on July 23, where the group were too drunk to play but did so anyway. Worse, Suede, headlining the show, were magisterial. The only way Blur appeared likely to revalidate themselves was with new music. Luckily,



“Tougher, spikier, more in your in your face”: the Blur live experience hits Freetown, Stoke-on-Trent, March 20, 1991.

art riot!

demos suggested they were onto something, something nurtured in the crucible of the spring’s gruelling US jaunt.

“The baggy side had gone,” says Mike Smith. “It was much more guitar-focused. Songs like Oily Water. They were reverting to the group they were before There’s No Other Way, a tougher, spikier, more in your face proposition.”

Food booked RAK studios for a September session with XTC’s Andy Partridge, one that looms large in Blur lore thanks to their abiding hatred for the versions of Coping, Sunday Sunday and 7 Days. “I’ve put it in my will that they will never come out in any form,” Dave Rowntree told this writer in 1999.

“I think they sound better than the versions they went with,” says Partridge today, “although I’m not supposed to say that – immodest mouse here! I think they have more fire and more *go*. They sound like young men, as opposed to floppy and half-awake on the versions they chose.”

Perhaps Blur’s attitudes to previous producers should have set Partridge’s alarm bells ringing…

“In my first conversation with them they said some rather uncomplimentary things about Stephen Street. To the effect of, ‘We’ll work with anyone but that cunt Stephen Street’.”

Blur were acting as if traumatised by previous studio experiences, passed around from producer to producer, loomed over by Balfe and his demands for dance-pop.

“When the red light came on, they didn’t seem to be champing at the bit,” Partridge recalls. “I realised that there was a lot of tension. Passive aggression, and not-so-passive aggression, between Graham and Damon. In fact as the sessions wore on, Graham would start ringing up, stone drunk about 11 in the morning, going, ‘I’m fucking not coming in today. I don’t wanna do it any more with that bastard Albarn.’ I thought to myself, These two aren’t going to last long in the same outfit.”

Yet Partridge insists the session concluded to the apparent satisfaction of all. “And then Balfe called: ‘You haven’t done it with a drum machine! You haven’t done it with a computer! I want it done with loops and everything!’”

Within a month, Blur had fled to the more familiar surroundings of Matrix Studios near the British Museum, reworking their new songs with “that cunt” Stephen Street. But the relationship with Balfe was approaching meltdown, and became practically non-existent when the group submitted their album only for the label head to announce there were no “killer-diller singles” and that Damon would have to go away and write one.

“Dave Balfe was the man with the big black hat and the evil moustache,” says Ross. “But he was right. If we didn’t have a stab at chart success with one or two ➢

BRITISH IMAGE 1

Dog days: Blur's Anglocentric revamp for *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, 1993; (below) a blissfully pre-Blur Andy Partridge; Jesus Jones's Mike Edwards plots pop's future; the key Blur singles Popscene and For Tomorrow.

> "GRAHAM WOULD RING UP, GOING, 'I DON'T WANNA DO IT ANY MORE WITH THAT BASTARD ALBARN.'"
> Andy Partridge

singles, their album would be stillborn. EMI would have pulled the plug on the marketing and Blur would have been dropped. Dave was fighting their corner too, but the band didn't realise that. They were hanging by a thread."

With hindsight, many of the hurdles placed in Blur's path were boons in disguise. His homesickness on the hateful US tour of '92 lit Albarn's passion for England and its pop lineage. And Balfe's rejection of Blur's second album was to prompt the creation of Blur's best song yet, written by Albarn on Christmas morning 1992, the crystallisation of something unique and newly poignant. "There's not that many who can go, 'Oh fuck it, I'll write a hit then'," says Balfe. "But that proved that Damon really can."

For Tomorrow ("the first sense of a soulfulness coming into the band," judges Mike Smith) slotted into *Modern Life Is Rubbish* – so dubbed after a graffito spotted by Albarn on the Bayswater Road – alongside Chemical World, the result of another 'write another single' ultimatum, this time from Blur's US label SBK. If the album was not a world-beater commercially, it was viable, full of promise and attitude. "It recalibrated them, repositioned them in what turned out to be a good way," Ross says.

blur
POPSCENE
blur
For Tomorrow

BUT THERE WERE TO BE NO THANKS FROM Albarn for the tough love that unlocked Blur's future. Feelings between Balfe and himself were too raw, and would remain so until much later in the '90s. For his part, Balfe concedes that even before he sold Food, lock and stock, to EMI at the start of 1994 – too soon, ironically, to cash in on Blur's *Parklife* apotheosis – he'd had enough.

"What I learned in that period was that Damon was far, far better than I thought he was," says Balfe. "Part of me was thrilled by that, but another part thought, Fuck, I can't play with it any more. I'm out of my depth."

For a band prone to define themselves in opposition – to grunge, to Suede, to Oasis – the wrangling with Balfe and Food had been another blessing in disguise. It had thickened their skins and sharpened their reflexes. And it's not as if Balfe's advice had *all* been terrible.

"I was always saying they should get a dance beat in it," Balfe says. "That's how you get played at discos – the city centre Digby's and Gatsby's – and get in the charts. And when they came up with Girls And Boys I was like, *That's* what I'm talking about."

He pauses for a moment, thoughtfully. "It was *fucking* annoying."

"IT'S BEEN VERY INTENSE – THE RECORD'S GOT A LOT TO DO WITH OUR RELATIONSHIP." Damon Albarn

(continued from page 76) Sitting across the table from Albarn, Graham Coxon cranes his neck towards the window. "It's not another Coca-Cola thing, is it?"

"There hasn't been any colour on the skyline for years," Albarn says, still staring at the pulsing lights on the horizon. He smiles. "That will end up obliquely in some lyric at some point, I'm sure."

Coxon almost glows at the very thought. Albarn has already turned the opposite window's less celebrated vista into a Blur song: in summer 2012, as a prelude to headlining the Best Of British Olympics Closing Concert at Hyde Park, the quartet released a single, Under The Westway – a hymn to London, possibly also a person, or maybe even a group. It was the latest manifestation of a reunion which had thus far delivered 2009's emotional performance at Glastonbury, the no less emotional No Distance Left To Run film and a limited edition 7-inch single for 2010's Record Store Day. Each spasm of activity dared the band's long-suffering fans to hope that everything was gearing up to a new Blur album, made by all four band members in full working order, thereby casting the anomalous *Think Tank* into shadow.

But in 2012, interviewed by John Harris in The Guardian, Albarn declared that "in all likelihood" the Olympics show would be their last and there would be no more Blur records after Under The Westway. One of those assumptions fell as soon as the following spring, as Blur began a tour of festivals and enormodomes in North, Central and South America, in the Far East and Europe. Then, on May 6, Albarn told the crowd at Hong Kong's Asia-World Arena: "We have a week in Hong Kong and we thought it might be a good time to try and record another record."

The subsequent radio silence, however, suggested otherwise. Albarn didn't listen back to the five-day session, returning instead to his Africa Express adventuring. Then he immersed himself in making his first bona fide solo album, *Everyday Robots*. Asked about the Hong Kong sessions in February 2014, he replied, perhaps not only to the questioning journalist, "Just because you record 15 ideas doesn't mean you've got an album."

The world was justifiably stunned, therefore, when on February 19, 2015, Blur announced the imminent release of a new album. MOJO meets Damon Albarn and Graham Coxon three days before the press conference, and both have the thousand yard stares of men who can't quite believe what they've done. Albarn was still recording vocals less than a month ago. Technically the album isn't even finished, as it has still to go through the mastering process, and release is two months away. But they do have artwork and a title: *The Magic Whip*. "I wasn't expecting to be here talking about this," Coxon says, sucking quickly on an e-cigarette.

Albarn murmurs in assent. "This is a series of very fortunate events. When I was saying last year, I can't see there being [a new Blur album], I genuinely didn't believe there ever could be."

"Yeah, that probably pissed me off a little bit," says Coxon.

Last September, Coxon told Albarn he wanted to work through the Hong Kong material, and proposed approaching Stephen Street, the producer who honed Blur's 1991 breakthrough single, There's No Other Way, guided home their watershed *Modern Life Is Rubbish* album and proceeded to helm *Parklife*, *The Great Escape* and *Blur*. Clear-eyed and ego-free, Street was able to reconcile the group's conflicting components – much as he did with The Smiths a decade previously.

"When Graham said that, I felt really good about it," Albarn says. "Emotionally and in our relationship, we were in the least problematic or opposing places we'd been for a very long time. I felt it was lovely that he was prepared to give time to this thing."

"It is a funny one," says Coxon. "You can see it quite drily – 'Oh I can see there's some good music there, let's get in amongst it…' But it's complicated as well. Because obviously the story of Blur, if it's a line, has had a few jagged areas. So there was obviously a bit of making amends. Actions speak louder than words."

How long is it since their relationship was so harmonious?

"*Parklife*," Albarn says, without hesitation. "The bike started wobbling after that! We fell off it a few times, got back on, and then it just… But yeah, that was the last time we were steady on our bicycles. It was a different world. Pop music was so different to how it is now. I always end up having this conversation in one form or another with Noel [Gallagher] when we have a drink together. We seem so different to the Ed Sheerans of this world."

"It was a matter of life and death, almost, to us," Coxon says. "And that's why, thinking about it, there was rivalry. Oasis and Blur – it was our lives. And that's probably why we were so passionate and so fucking eager to fight. That's all we had. It was a '60s-style muddle. Whereas now, it seems like you get your shit together in your bedroom when you're 14 or 15, you go to an institution, and you're really business-savvy."

"Really aware of how to play the game," Albarn nods, "and what the game is. We had no idea that there even *was* a game. I hope there's still loads of kids getting in Transit vans and driving round the country. Because it's such a wonderful thing to do when you're young."

THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN DAMON Albarn and Graham Coxon is the essence of Blur. The pair met at Stanway Comprehensive in early '80s Colchester. Albarn served notice of his assertiveness by advising Coxon on footwear hierarchy – "Your brogues are crap mate. Look, mine are the proper sort" – but mutuality grew amid shared appreciation of The Jam, The Specials and The Smiths. Their first musical dabblings soon went beyond school revues and into prototype bands: The Aftermath, Real Lives, Circus.

The symbiosis evident even at this stage would sustain throughout their creative life: after Damon had instigated a chord sequence, Graham would take it somewhere. On *Think Tank*, Coxon's presence was felt even when he wasn't there, as producer Ben Hillier realised. "Having not worked much with Blur before, it became clear to me that the person who finished an album was Graham," he says. "The person who started stuff was Damon. The hardest thing working with a really creative mind like Damon is making them finish anything. That doesn't interest them at all. They're not interested in the craft, they're interested ➢

Damon today: "The bike started wobbling after *Parklife*."

Paul Spencer, Getty (2), Tom Oldham

模糊 Out Of Focus 魔鞭

SOULFUL, COMPLEX, WEIRD: 10 TALES FROM BLUR'S DARK SIDE.

Sing

(from *Leisure*, 1991)

Baggy-era Blur weirdly predicted their narcotic, troubled future-self, circa *13*, on this hypnotic six-minute track. Guitars sound like a far-off angle grinder, while hazy, haunting melodies unfold a tale of prematurely lost faith. *PG*

Coping

(from *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, 1993)

The Balfe/Teardrop Explodes influence bubbled through on the mechanised, cerebral '80s mood-rock of Coping (as in Julian Cope?), its playful synth solo and rueful *Weltanschauung* powerfully and irreconcilably at odds – like Blur itself. *PG*

London Loves

(from *Parklife*, 1994)

XTC meets Bowie's *Scary Monsters* on a mechanoid smash-groove that epitomises *Parklife*'s oft-overlooked depth and breadth. Paranoid, exhilarated, Albarn depicts the capital as carnivorous creature; its snarl is Coxon's Frippesque solo at 1.44. *DE*

He Thought Of Cars

(from *The Great Escape*, 1995)

Albarn's hymn-like cut'n'paste of dystopian headlines for tomorrow's tabloids prove a doomy, yet touching echo of This Is A Low's soulful melancholy amid *The Great Escape*'s manic pop kinks. *PS*

You're So Great

(from *Blur*, 1997)

A 'how to' guide for scuffing-up Britpop. Graham Coxon's marginally in-tune solo track at the heart of *Blur* balances rough edges, humble charm and sunshine pop sensibilities. The keystone of a post-Country House world. *PS*

Death Of A Party

(from *Blur*, 1997)

Demoed acoustically in 1992, Death Of A Party borrowed its despondent man-alone sentiments from The Smiths' How Soon Is Now?, but, revitalised with a *More Specials*-style doom-reggae arrangement, its personal woe is transformed into cultural and political discontent. *PG*

Caramel

(from *13*, 1999)

A beautiful bleak vista of jazz-rock sadness, not totally unlike Popol Vuh, and possibly about smack ("I've gotta stop smoking," mumbles Albarn). Officially the song least likely to be recorded by the authors of Country House. *DE*

Black Book

(B-Side, Music Is My Radar, 2000)

Originally slated as the A-side until Music Is My Radar's visionary kraut-quirk flipped the stand-alone single, this gently brewing lament is anything but throwaway. Rather it's an ebbing emotive, fuzz-driven tide to swell heavy hearts. *PS*

Battery In Your Leg

(from *Think Tank*, 2003)

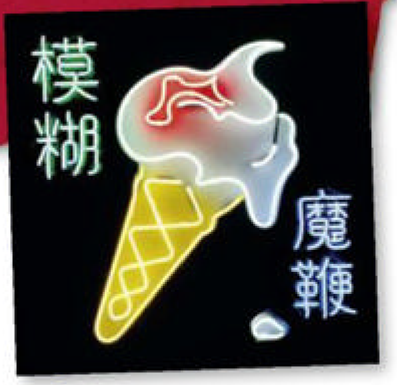
Blur managed to float above their bad mood blues for this wonky epic at *Think Tank*'s climax. "This is a ballad for the good times," croons Damon over his bandmate's brooding guitars. Neither would return for six long years. *PS*

Thought I Was A Spaceman

(from *The Magic Whip*, 2015)

The new album's quiet centre builds from contrapuntal beats and acoustic guitar into a glorious melancholic soar, like New Order ghosting over the ocean. Dig Coxon's yearning answer-vocal: "Thought I was a spaceman, digging out my heart…" *KC*

blur
PARKLIFE



≺ in the spark. Graham has got a lot more of the craft gene in him."

Blur's genetic opposites haven't always had to be in sync for the band to do great work, but Coxon's alienation around the time of *The Great Escape* troubled Albarn such that he shifted Blur's sonic parameters to placate him, ditching shiny music hall pastiche and instead accommodating the guitarist's fondness for American discord – hence the *Blur* album's Chinese Bombs and its bracing approximation of a baby Black Flag. Coincidentally or not, this move reacquainted Blur with its art school grounding and, allied with Albarn's discovery of music as a means of inner exploration – a revelatory period that he's since admitted was aided by heroin – produced arguably Blur's most enduring music, on *Blur* and *13*.

So it's telling that Coxon felt it was incumbent on him to make amends, as if guilty that the band had indulged his foibles while getting too little in return – a cloud of resentment that finally broke at the early *Think Tank* sessions. Coxon considers this when MOJO speaks to him alone after *The Magic Whip*'s big reveal.

"Although we shoved it all aside when we got back together to play shows in 2009, I realised that passions were still slightly high about it all. Y'know, in those years since early 2002, I probably said a few stupid things in the press – because the circumstances of why we weren't together as a four-piece were quite unclear." He laughs. "We'd met a couple of times – one was some mediation thing where we had to go over stuff that was difficult…"

Blur went to see a relationship counsellor?

"Yes, a sort of mediator. Things were just tense. We were all raw and hurt by it, for quite a while. And the longer it was left, that stuff ferments, and the more difficult the idea was of coming together, or being just friends again. To be honest, the last couple of years when I was in Blur it wasn't like we were really good friends, like we could ring each other up. Everything was going through management and we all had our own lives, our own problems.

"I went in and did some *Think Tank* sessions in really good faith but I didn't realise if I was acting strangely or not. Perhaps I was. I'd just got out of rehab, I was coping with life in a very different mind-set, which wasn't one I particularly liked – everything was a bit too real. But whatever happened between 2002 and 2009 probably did us a lot of good. If Blur had carried on as we were, we'd all have been severely damaged by it.

"So yeah, it entered my head that actually the only good way to say sorry is to create something positive. To get hold of those Hong Kong tapes and knock them into shape, to take the weight of responsibility on my own shoulders and make amends."

AND SO, COXON AND STREET HUNKERED DOWN in the latter's Bermondsey studio for weeks, sifting the Hong Kong material, editing, rearranging, augmenting and generally building a structure from the jams the quartet had built up over Albarn's basic iPad demos. Alex James and Dave Rowntree dropped in to redo their parts where necessary. The moment of truth came when Coxon and Street played Albarn what they had done.

"We were very nervous," Street admits. "Because he might have said, 'It's not up to much, I'm not interested.'"

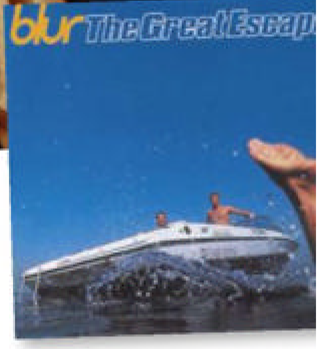
"Part of me wanted not to like it," Albarn says. "That would mean I didn't have to do any work. But annoyingly, I really loved it."

Committed to promoting his solo album in Australia until just

Paul Postle, Camera Press (2), Nels Israelson, Tom Oldham

Their imperial majesty: (from far left) at the Dublin Castle, Camden, May 18, 1995; backstage at Glastonbury 1994 with (centre) Phil Daniels; consorting with the enemy at the NME's Brat Awards, February 1995; Blur play Masters Of The Universe on the back sleeve of *The Great Escape*.

SELECT
Who'd be best friends of the rich and shameless?
mates
Dishing the dirt on...
Blur



before Christmas, Albarn detoured on his journey home from Sydney and spent two days in Hong Kong, reimbuing himself with its uniquely intense energy, to inspire lyrics that would characterise the music Blur had recorded 18 months earlier.

"It had to be about something," he says. "So I had to go back. On my own." He made films, took photographs, and filled up the ideas notebook that he'd begun during that week in May 2013. One word leapt out at him: "dysto-popia". "I'd written it in three colours. I thought about that word. It's a made-up word that made a lot of sense."

After Christmas 2014, at his house in Iceland, Albarn worked on the lyrics for two weeks before returning to London in January and recorded his vocals with Stephen Street at Studio 13. It was the first time the pair had worked together since 1996. If Street was apprehensive – "I didn't know if he would take direction, I didn't know if he was the same guy" – then so too was the singer.

"I didn't know whether I could even take his methodical working methods seriously any more," Albarn says. "I'd made so many records in a much more spontaneous way. But actually it worked brilliantly. I realised my nervousness was based on the fact that I was nervous *back then*. I was remembering my lack of confidence. Now, I just do it."

Mixing *The Magic Whip* finally wrapped up the day before Albarn and Coxon meet MOJO.

"It's been very intense – the record's got a lot to do with our relationship," Damon says, looking at Graham, "our relationship at that moment."

Presumably, the same could be said about every Blur album, albeit some more than others. Sweet Song on *Think Tank* (opening lyric: "What am I to do/ Someone here is really not happy") seems very clearly an elegy for a love gone wrong.

"Well, our relationship was non-existent at that point." Albarn has been fiddling with an incense stick for a while. Finally locating a cigarette lighter, he sparks it up. "As you get older," he says, wafting the aroma around, "as your families grow up, you realise we were too young and stupid to understand or value what we had or how lucky we were. As people or musicians. We don't feel like that any more. We realise that to throw away relationships is madness. But we all had to find our own lives."

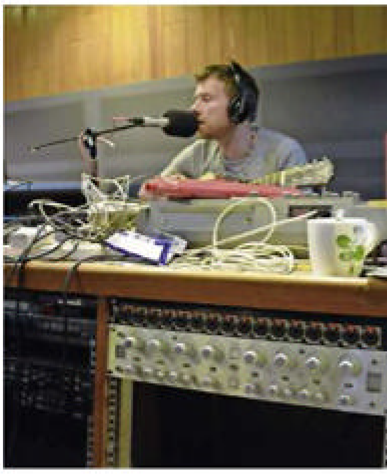
Coxon nods vigorously. "And where we've gone on our quests, individually, we've got a rucksack-full of really good stuff to use. So it's turned out pretty good."

AFTER TALKING WITH Albarn and Coxon, MOJO drives south-east across London for a rendezvous with Dave Rowntree, Blur's man of many parts: drummer, computer animator, pilot, criminal defence solicitor, Labour Party parliamentary candidate and presenter of his own show on XFM. We meet in The Garrison, a gastro-pub sympto- ➢

Dave: "We can't even keep what we had for breakfast secret"; (far left) *The Magic Whip*'s sleeve breaks cover.

"TRUTH BE TOLD, IT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME WE'D STARTED A NEW BLUR ALBUM." Dave Rowntree

模糊魔鞭



All the people, so many people: at Hyde Park, July 3, 2009; (right) Blur explore "dysto-popia" during work on *The Magic Whip*, Avon Studios, Hong Kong, May 2013.

> 模糊魔鞭
>
> "DAMON IS TERRIFIED OF LIVING ON PAST GLORIES. IT'S A HINDRANCE, IN A WAY."
>
> Alex James

≺ matic of the redevelopment that has, at least superficially, transformed Bermondsey from one of London's most run-down areas. A mile away is the studio where Stephen Street and Graham Coxon shaped the Hong Kong session; work undertaken in total secrecy – much to Rowntree's bewilderment.

"I was saying, Just forget this!" he laughs. "We can't even bloody keep what we had for breakfast secret, how are we gonna keep the new Blur album a secret?"

Ben Hillier has a studio in the same building as Stephen Street and one day he bumped into Graham Coxon and Alex James. "I was like, What are you up to…?" Hillier says. "There were a lot of 'ums' and they told me they were working on a soundtrack." He laughs. "I thought that was a bit strange, but not completely inconceivable."

Following Albarn's on-stage revelation of the Hong Kong session, Rowntree estimates that in the course of his work, legal or otherwise, he was asked about the new Blur album at least once a week. Each time, he gave the same honest answer: they'd started a record but hadn't been able to finish it, and thereafter people's schedules hadn't permitted work to be resumed.

"Truth be told, it wasn't the first time we'd started a new Blur album," he says. "It was actually the third."

The most recent attempt had been a session with William Orbit in early 2012, which yielded a version of Under The Westway that the band deemed unsuccessful and shelved – only for Orbit to leak it on the internet, "as a two-fingers to Damon, I think," Coxon says, "which is not awfully charming but it happens. Sometimes I prefer that version to the one we released!"

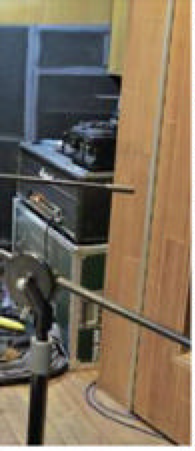
After the Street sessions were completed, however, Rowntree faced a dilemma. How could he truthfully answer the queries about the new Blur album, now that album was moving rapidly towards actual existence? "I thought, I can't lie. But, it was bizarre. Nobody asked. *Nobody*! Not a peep from anyone. Except the producer of my radio show – who jokingly said, 'New Blur album?' I went, Haha! And changed the subject."

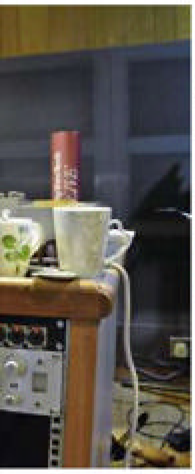
Alex in wonderland: "We've made a classic Blur record."

PA, Tom Oldham (3)

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 19. FIVE hours after the blanket of *omerta* around *The Magic Whip* is finally lifted, MOJO and the four members of Blur are squeezed into a lift at BBC Radio 1's new studios in Broadcasting House. "You do realise," Damon Albarn stage whispers as we're led through its open-plan environs, all hot-desks and hipster beards, "that we're the oldest people here."

The press conference had been hosted by Zane Lowe, and the Radio 1 presenter's evening show is now the final port of call in what's been an intense reacquaintance with the promotional waterboard. Although





Putting a brave face on a Graham-free Blur, 2003: "[We had] a bit of a siege mentality."

hardly of the Jeremy Paxman school, Lowe's interview style – "Can I just say something real quick Graham? You know, you are this country's greatest living guitar player" – has prompted Albarn and Alex James to crack open an emergency stash of Stella Artois.

Fresh from a family holiday and looking unfeasibly healthy for a man whose notorious champagne days/cocaine nights lifestyle amid the Britpop blizzard tended to obscure his abilities as a musician, James brushes aside the suggestion that a return to Blur's media scrummage will have him pining for the quiet life down on his Oxfordshire farm. "Yesterday I was wrangling five kids onto a plane," he says, as MOJO finds a peaceful corner. "Believe me, this is a day off."

Despite seeming content with his cheese-maker-cum-festival-promoter country life, it doesn't take long in James's company to sense him pining for Blur as a more tangible presence. He pinpoints 2012's London Olympics show at Hyde Park as crucial: in the absence of a new album, only an invitation of such magnitude was going to sufficiently focus the minds, particularly of the band's two full-time ➤

"IT WAS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH. OASIS & BLUR – IT WAS OUR LIVES."
Graham Coxon
模糊魔鞭

Graham gets the nark: "He kind of ripped them apart."

WorldMags

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE...

HOW *THINK TANK* STUMBLED OUT OF THE RUINS OF BLUR. BY PRODUCER **Ben Hillier**.

"EVERYONE TRIED TO BE NICE TO EACH OTHER BUT IT DIDN'T GO WELL."

"We started in Damon's studio, 13, in late 2001. Graham came in for a couple of sessions and everyone tried to be nice to each other but it didn't go well. After Battery In Your Leg, which we all liked and Graham liked as well, I think, his playing on the other tracks sounded so disruptive. He kind of ripped them apart. It became clear this wasn't just a personality clash; it was 'We don't want to make music together' – a very different feel.

At that point we had a lot of tracks that we'd started and we sat down, listened to them and went, 'They're really good, this is really exciting! This project doesn't sound like another Blur record particularly, but there's not another name to call it.' The decision to go on without Graham gave us a bit of a siege mentality.

Going to Morocco was us starting to finish it. One of the issues I was having with the record as a whole, especially in 13, was that everything sounded unfinished. Rather than finishing tracks Damon was writing new tracks. At one point there were 32 songs up for grabs that we managed to whittle down to 26. So the finishing touches were done in Morocco and quite a lot of vocals too. And then we put the whole Morocco studio back in its truck and drove it down to a farm in Devon that Damon owned. That was quite a scene change because we'd gone from the foot of the Atlas mountains, this really warm and dry place, to Devon in November with horizontal rain and no daylight at all. It was a shock, but it kind of worked.

Think Tank was recorded as it was written. Damon would start with a really basic idea. It could be anything from a chorus to just a couple of notes and then I would record them jamming it out and reacting to that idea. So all the stuff recorded was not just first take, it was the first time it had ever been played. It was all very creative and quick. People say about a lot of bands that when they get together some sort of magic happens but with Blur it really is true, they spark off each other. For Out Of Time I think Damon had the first line and the 'out of time' phrase and I recorded them playing it for half an hour, round and round, and that was how the structure of the song came about.

I was always really happy with that record, though personally I would have had a slightly different tracklisting. That was an argument that went on at the time and I still think I'm right. There are a couple of tracks on there that are trying too hard to be singles. Damon loves a bit of success and he's always a bit nervous about not getting that. But there's a lightness, openness and gentleness to *Think Tank* that's stamped on by the more aggressive songs. I would have kept it lighter and sadder – but then I tend to make records like that.

It's strange how things turn out though. I've made five records with Graham, yet I ended up producing the Blur album he's not on."

As told to Paul Stokes

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER
Alex James
bit of a blur
the autobiography

From top: with the author, Glasgow, March 25, 1992; lightly grilled by Zane Lowe, Chinatown, February 19, 2015; James's memoir – an unlikely peacemaker.

◄ music-makers. "It was something none of us felt we could turn down," he says. That night's euphoria provided the momentum to take up arms again for 2013's global trek, but even then, had it not been for the unforeseeable cancellation of gigs in Taipei and Tokyo creating an enforced week-long stopover in Hong Kong, James doubts whether the new album would have ever come to pass.

"The longer it went on, the bigger a mountain to climb it was – for Damon particularly. The thought of ever doing another Blur record became a more complicated thing to answer: what should it be? In 2009, it was like, Wow! That was good! We should think about doing that again… But part of the problem is getting everybody in the same place at the same time, and we didn't have that problem in Hong Kong, we were all there with nothing to do. For me, it's always been just turning up and playing the bass, there's been very little suffering or torment involved at any stage. Damon's a brilliant songwriter, Graham's a brilliant guitar player, and we all gel together really well. We're lucky to find each other. I think we've made a classic Blur record. The first one for 15 years!"

Had he always kept the faith?

"Yeah. But I think Damon is absolutely terrified of living on past glories." He laughs suddenly. "It's a hindrance, in a way."

A FORTNIGHT LATER, MOJO SPEAKS TO DAMON Albarn on the phone. He's at the National Theatre on London's South Bank, workshopping wonder.land, a new musical adaptation of Lewis Carroll's Alice In Wonderland that sees him reunited with director Rufus Norris, with whom Albarn wrote 2011's Dr Dee: An English Opera.

"We had a big day today," he says, "'cos we actually sat with everybody and ran through what we've got so far. The first half was amazing, the second half we still need to work on. But I think we know how it ends, and we'll play about with characters, and… we're in fairly good shape, I think." The production premieres in June at the Manchester International Festival, before transferring to the National for a lengthy Christmas run. "So it's got to be good, basically. Or else I'm fucked. Again."

I first met Albarn in March 1992, when Blur were the wide-eyed pop fizzbombs on the Rollercoaster tour, a two-week package headlined by The Jesus And Mary Chain alongside Dinosaur Jr. and My Bloody Valentine. Blur held their own onstage but even more impressive was Albarn's personal composure amid such heavyweight company. Already written off in the wake of the wan, derivative *Leisure*, here was a young man quietly certain that his band would prevail; that his time would come. Still, no one, perhaps not even he, could have predicted his future status as celebrated pan-disciplinary arts figure.

It's likewise remarkable that Blur remain a living entity after 25 years, albeit one that seems to hover ambivalently in Albarn's rear-view mirror, the band both catalyst and hostage to his creative growth. Ironically, the successful late-'90s recalibration of Blur undermined its future viability, by proving to Albarn that he could operate outside the band format.

"Probably subconsciously, that was the point where I definitely realised I could do it on my own," Albarn says, carefully. "Maybe. I didn't know quite how – but I knew I wanted to give it a go. We'd just come to the end of 10 long years being in each other's pockets. Everything was transforming. William Orbit had a massive part to play in *13*. We were in freefall by that point, really, it was just a really free, loose process. It was just very different. *I* was very different. I was in my own world, Graham was in his own world and William was the portal between those two.

"I went on to do Gorillaz directly after that. I realised that you could sample everything and it didn't matter whether it was a band playing it or anything. That for me was an amazing revelation."

TODAY, SITTING TOGETHER IN STUDIO 13, the portal between Damon and Graham – Blur's 4 ever couple – is the band itself. And for that, unlikely as it might seem, we have to thank Alex James's autobiography, Bit Of A Blur. A queasily authentic glimpse into the pre-millennial debauch that was Britpop, it also prompted Graham Coxon to make the short journey from his house to Camden's Koko club on October 22, 2008, where he extended the hand of friendship (over tea and Eccles cake) to Damon Albarn, then preparing for an Africa Express gig.

"I read Alex's book," Coxon says, "and then I looked at other groups like us who'd split up, like Pink Floyd. I thought it was really, really sad that Pink Floyd can now not reform, ever. As a fan, it just seems like, What a bickering load of self-obsessed old ladies! I didn't want us to look like that. Back then, I don't think I'd allow myself thoughts of making a new record. But I had hopes."

Albarn smiles at that, then seems to catch himself.

"We just wanted to do something that's worth putting out, that we think is worth putting out. And that's it."

"I think I said, Even if it's the last thing we do, we have to leave it in a great positive way," Coxon says. "And then I said, Like *Abbey Road* did for The Beatles. I mean, that's really pathetic, but I am like that: What would The Beatles have done?"

"None of us are getting any younger," says Albarn. "If you do something, it's gotta fucking count. It *has* to count. Otherwise, what are we doing? But we have done it now. So there you go." Albarn is looking towards MOJO, on his feet, like a man with a musical to finish. "That's it. Anything else?"

Only the most obvious question: is this a new beginning for Blur?

"For safety's sake, I would say no," he says. "But I have said that many times before. I'm notorious for saying something and doing something else. Don't listen to me. But no." He makes to leave, then pauses, as if remembering something his friend across the table said earlier. "But, actions speak louder than words." Ⓜ

Ed Sirrs, Tom Oldham (2)

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC. EDITED BY JENNY BULLEY

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> "Subtle touches abound within the mayhem."
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> **BEN THOMPSON WIGS OUT WITH YOUNG FATHERS. ALBUMS P88**

RATINGS & FORMATS

Your guide to the month's best music is now even more definitive with our handy format guide. CD COMPACT DISC DL DOWNLOAD ST STREAMING LP VINYL MC CASSETTE DVD DIGITAL VIDEO DISC C IN CINEMAS BR BLU-RAY

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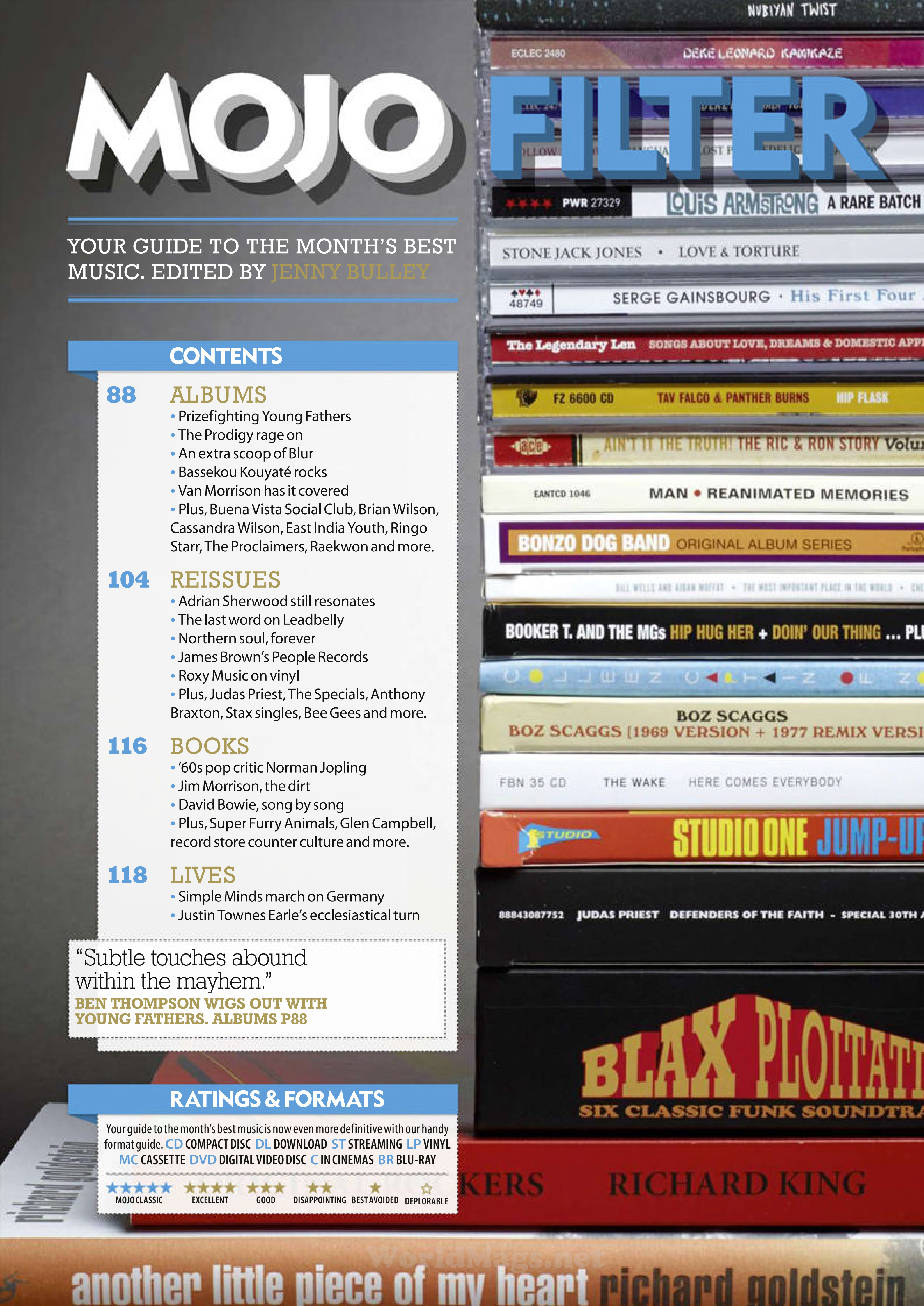
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Meet the parents

A vivacious follow-up to 2014's Mercury-winning *Dead* heralds the Edinburgh trio's arrival as global citizens. By Ben Thompson. Illustration by Gee Vaucher.

Young Fathers

★★★★

White Men Are Black Men Too

BIG DADA. CD/DL/LP

Have you ever wondered where all that energy went? All the piss and vinegar and sweat bullets which used to fly around the questions of how black white performers could get away with sounding, how white black performers could get away with sounding, and whether any of us should really be hearing skin colour in music anyway? Well, Young Fathers have located a good supply of that energy and plugged this record straight into it.

Follow the fairground organ signpost into first single Rain Or Shine and the musical landscape inhabited by this lean and hungry Edinburgh trio opens up before you like a never-before-visited next level in a 1990s video game. The pummelling beat and by turns crooned, chanted and whooped vocal – "Imma show where… to go down in the squalor" – might be a '60s beat group covering Kanye's *Yeezus*. But it could just as easily be Mr Kardashian-West himself, having a polemical shot at 96 Tears; perhaps with a scorching guitar solo from Dave Davies, and/or Rihanna on triangle.

Those kinds of tensions were the mains supply of great popular music from Elvis to Public Enemy and Led Zeppelin to The Jackson 5, but you wouldn't have known it watching class-of-2014 golden boys George Ezra or Sam Smith perform on Brits night. Their heartfelt and yet somehow insipid Instagram snapshots of black music tropes gone-by seem to have been taken on fading battery power. And in this prevailing climate of 'colour-blindness', Young Fathers' Old Rock'n'Roll jolts like an electric shock. It's not so much the chanted 'n'-words in the chorus that supply a welcome wake-up call; the real kicker is the sudden influx of historical perspective: "Old rock'n'roll/Not what you've been sold/Congo Square is open for business/I was there as God is my witness."

It's typical of Young Fathers that this potentially contentious reference to New Orleans' most packed-with-historical-baggage public space – the place where the city's slave population would gather in the time when it was allowed to, and hence arguably the fountainhead of rhythm and blues as we know it – should come wrapped up in one of the sweetly melodious middle eights which are the band's stock in trade. Their music is often at its most infectiously joyful when songs trespass onto war-torn lyrical terrain. If the next nine months bring a catchier polemical piano ballad about Nestlé's powdered milk than Nest, then 2015 will have been a vintage year for them.

It was the pop-tastic hookiness of *Dead* which made the carping about Alloysious Massaquoi (big beard), Kayus Bankole (dreadlocks) and Graham 'G' Hastings (producer)'s 2014 Mercury win look so ridiculous. That album was – and is – positively writhing with earworms, and its successor is no different. Never mind the 'Mercury curse' (often just code for an 'indie'-favouring music biz's resistance to the idea of 'urban' winners anyway), *White Men Are Black Men Too* places Young Fathers firmly alongside Suede, Dizzee Rascal and Arctic Monkeys in the pantheon of those whose post-Mercury follow-ups confirm they know exactly where they're going and aren't going to let winning a modest prize distract them.

Graham 'G' Hastings' at once headlong and beautifully controlled production keeps the sweat flowing off the walls. Hastings has some of Martin Hannett's happy knack for making music that feels like it is simultaneously pushing out into new spaces and trapped inside a biscuit tin. And yet subtle touches abound within the mayhem – from the happy echoes of Cluster and Harmonia bubbling up through the album's opening two tracks, to the euphoric whistling interlude with which the entirely vivacious John Doe translates the Cajun hedonist's battle cry "Laissez les bon temps rouler" into Ray Charles' "Let the good times roll".

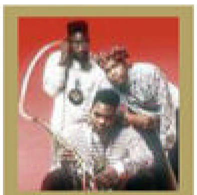
In a world where the shock troops of cod-gospel invariably wear their choirs on their sleeves (at the Grammy Awards, even Beyoncé succumbed), the decision to make the Leith Congregational Choir fight their way through an electronic blizzard to register their brace of cameo appearances seems especially inspired. Of all the musical categories you might create in the hope of encompassing the elegiac rush of Liberated or the contagious blush of Shame – 'gangsta synth-pop', 'Kraut-rock with a boy-band tweak' and 'a motorik One Nation Under A Groove' were the first three that sprang to my mind – it's the ones which reference Massaquoi and Bankole's African ancestry (the former was born in Liberia, the latter in Edinburgh to Nigerian parents) which most easily miss the mark.

Although this record sounds as apt next to Kasai All-Stars as it does next to Massive Attack or TV On The Radio, the African-ness on which Young Fathers draw is not some static reservoir of back-to-their-rootsness but rather a legacy of infinite adaptability. Listen to the African mixtape they put online last year, and from the Congolese Catholic mass to the Zimbabwean street-seller hustling carrots via his rough and ready take on Jamaican dancehall, the music is all about mutating to survive.

If you'd like to reset the clock on a new era when the worn out language of other people's transcendence might be superseded by something much rougher and more readily applicable to its own moment, now would be as good a time as any to do it. No one can say what this baby's going to be called yet, but Young Fathers just gave birth to it.

KEY TRACKS
- Rain Or Shine
- Old Rock'n'Roll
- John Doe

"THEIR MUSIC IS AT ITS MOST INFECTIOUS AND JOYFUL WHEN SONGS ARE IN WAR-TORN LYRICAL TERRAIN."

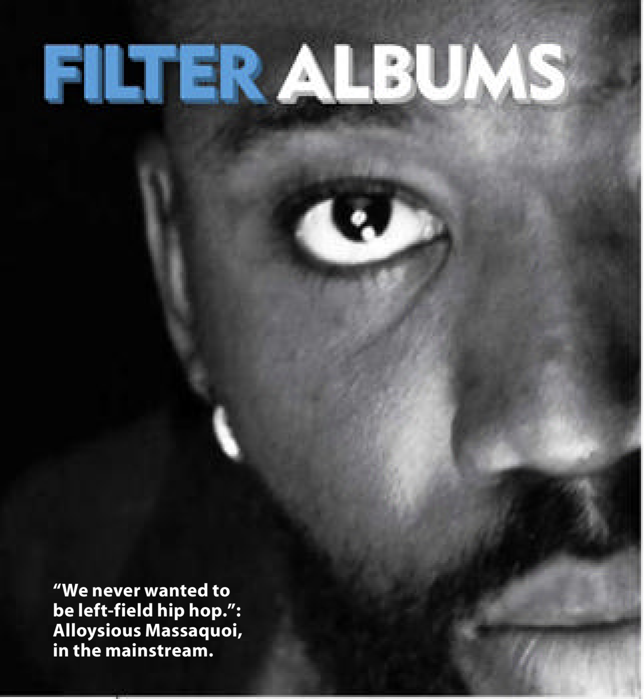


Getty Images

BACK STORY: CLOSE HARMONY

- In the tradition of De La Soul (pictured) or Massive Attack, Young Fathers have got great three-way vocal chemistry. "Even though we're not blood relations," Alloysious explains, "we've been singing together for so long – since we were 14, and we're 27 now, so that's pretty much half our lives – that it feels more like we're a family. Kayus has got this raspy thing, and Graham's got soul in his voice, but he can hit hard notes, shouty notes. I've got more of a sweet blending kind of voice that glues the other two together, but I can also make it sound dirty".

FATHERS TALK! ALLOYSIOUS MASSAQUOI ON BERLIN, BIG RAP AND KEEPING IT SIMPLE…



"We never wanted to be left-field hip hop.": Alloysious Massaquoi, in the mainstream.

"We did decide to simplify things…"

Young Fathers' Alloysious Massaquoi speaks to Ben Thompson.

The decision to record this album in Berlin had been made before you won the 2014 Mercury Prize for *Dead*, hadn't it?

"Yes. We'd been there previously and the vibe of the place just got under our skin. Obviously the history of people like Lou Reed or David Bowie being drawn to it appealed to us, but it was more about how the city felt to us now. All our last three records – *Tape One*, *Tape Two* and *Dead* – had been made in the same basement studio in Edinburgh, and we wanted to put ourselves in a different situation where we would maybe feel a bit uncomfortable and not quite know what we were doing, because that's when all the most exciting things seem to happen."

So it wasn't A Stars In Their Eyes thing… "Tonight, Harry, we're going to be *Low*-era Bowie"?

(*Laughs*) "No, not exactly. Obviously Berlin has changed a lot since those days – not just in the Wall coming down, but in other ways too – which doesn't stop a lot of people trying to hold on to the idea of what it used to be by hanging around looking miserable and taking lots of drugs. But that wasn't what we were there for. To us it still feels pretty industrial and also really young, although it had even changed a lot since the last time we were there. Whatever everyone thinks of as being the cool, happening place does tend to get a bit over-saturated, and I remember us all bursting out laughing when this woman photographer who'd got a bit disillusioned told us Berlin was 'the new Brighton'."

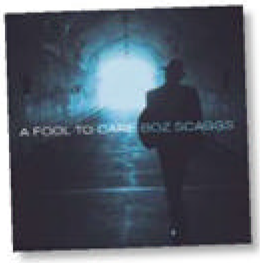
In terms of the difference between *White Men Are Black Men Too* and its predecessor, this one seems to have a lot less words…

"We did make a conscious decision to try to simplify things. Sometimes it's more of a challenge to get the best four lines rather the best 16 bars."

What would you say to someone who thought that by stickering your new record "File under pop and rock" you were turning your back on your hip hop origins?

"It's the opposite of that. If you think of the biggest rappers, people like Jay-Z and Drake, they're pop and rock as well, so why shouldn't that apply to us too? We've never wanted to be thought of as left-field hip hop. I remember us turning up at open-mike nights in Edinburgh when we were about 15. All these guys who wanted to be hard would be doing their 8 Mile raps and we'd have brought mini-discs of backing tracks with carefully structured pop songs on – choruses, verses, middle-eights, the whole thing. The crowd would be raging by the end of it – 'What the fuck was that?' But it's good to give people something they're not expecting, and that's the heritage we're staying true to."

Rob Shanahan



Boz Scaggs

★★★★

A Fool To Care

429. CD/DL

Most Bozdacious follow-up to 2013's-lauded *Memphis*.

After as much success as anyone could want or handle in the '70s, peaking with 1975's blue-eyed soul smash *Silk Degrees*, singer/guitarist/songwriter Boz Scaggs retreated into the shadows in the '80s, slowly re-emerging during the '90s. Now, after 2013's fine *Memphis*, comes this strong 12-song effort. *A Fool To Care* has scarcely a weak note, let alone track, and Scaggs even takes on Curtis Mayfield and Al Green. Cover versions of soul gems habitually make this writer throw a fit but Scaggs's versions of The Impressions' I'm So Proud and the Reverend's Full Of Fire are convincing, particularly the former. Empathetic studio hounds ensure everything works – from Bobby Charles's Small Town Talk and Richard Hawley's There's A Storm A Comin' to the New Orleans of High Blood Pressure and the title track and Latin of Last Tango On 16th Street. Only The Band's Whispering Pines, with Lucinda Williams duetting raspily, seems close to a misstep. Great, great stuff, though.

Geoff Brown

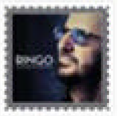
Ringo Starr

★★★

Postcards From Paradise

UME. CD/DL/LP

Solo set 18 from the world's most famous drummer.



Ringo Starr's new solo releases don't generate too much enthusiasm these days, but dearth of takers aside, there's still usually something likable enough about them. *Postcards From Paradise* is no exception. Surrounded by his recent All-Starr Band (Todd Rundgren, Gregg Rolie, etc) and other trusted associates (Joe Walsh, Benmont Tench), Starr offers up 11 good-natured, mostly mid-tempo trifles heavy on the nostalgia (Rory And The Hurricanes; the title track) and sage advice (Let Love Lead; Island In The Sun). Starr (under his birth name of Richard Starkey) co-penned each tune this time, with the aforementioned fanboys and, notably, Van Dyke Parks, who also contributes keyboards and horn arrangements to the pair's Bamboula. With its Little Feat-like funky shuffle, clever storyline and a particularly sassy vocal from Starr, it's confirmation that the old boy's still got a few tricks in him.

Jeff Tamarkin

Van Morrison

★★★★

Duets: Re-Working The Catalogue

RCA. CD/DL/LP

Van digs deep in his treasure trove with stellar guests.

Ol' Van loves a duet, doesn't he? The cynic might dismiss this as an enlightened but opportunistic way of recycling some dusty old material. But 're-working' is the key and Van delves deep to breathe new life into some relatively lesser-known gems ranging from 1974's Streets Of Arklow (from *Veedon Fleece*) to Get On With The Show (*What's Wrong With This Picture?*, 2003), rejuvenating them with persuasive soul and passion. With Don Was and Bob Rock at the controls, Van is on fire, his intensity and determined energy inspiring his hardy collaborators. P.J. Proby is a revelation on Whatever Happened To P.J. Proby; daughter Shona convincingly plunges into Rough God Goes Riding, and Clare Teal makes a showstopping contribution to Carrying A Torch. He returns to last album *No Plan B* for a rip-roaring Born To Sing with Chris Farlowe and even Michael Bublé breaks sweat on Real Real Gone. It's joyous.

Colin Irwin

Ringo Starr: heavy on the nostalgia and sage advice.

Todd Rundgren

★★

Global

ESOTERIC ANTENNA. CD/DL/LP

Veteran rock'n'roll maverick does EDM. Results mixed.

At 66, an age at which most rock artists have run out of puff, Todd Rundgren releases two very different albums this year. *Global* is an orthodox solo record in which the dominant tone is electronica. To follow is a more experimental collaboration with Norwegian producer Hans-Peter Lindstrøm and alternative rock musician Emil Nikolaisen. Rundgren's long career, including 25 solo albums since 1970's *Runt*, has been defined by radical stylistic change. *Global* is simply another roll of the dice. What it lacks, however, is the quality of songwriting in his best work from the '70s. Typical of this album, Skyscraper sounds like a Daft Punk outtake, Ev'rybody has the industrial rock clatter of imperial-phase Depeche Mode and, weirdly, on Rise there are echoes of both The Stone Roses and Fad Gadget. Rundgren remains unpredictable: impressively so. But really, he's better than this.

Paul Elliott

The Sonics

★★★★

This Is The Sonics

REVOX. CD/DL/LP

Stellar return of Tacoma, WA's '60s garage rock kings.

During the 50 years since The Sonics last released a new album, practically everything about the world has changed – everything apart from The Sonics, thankfully. With three-fifths of the original line-up joined by a rhythm section whose credits include Link Wray and The Kingsmen, the title's bullishly definitive claim is justified: *This Is The Sonics* emits the same primal heat that's inspired successive generations of garage-dwellers, from The Cramps through Mudhoney to The White Stripes. Detroit producer Jim Diamond keeps the levels red on a set split 60/40 between rasping R&B makeovers – Marty Robbins' Sugaree; Eddie Floyd's Leaving Here – and caustic originals. Jerry Roslie's Save The Planet is the pick of the latter, a drinking man's eco-anthem ("We gotta save the planet, it's the only one with beer"), while the cover of Ray Davies's The Hard Way scorches The Kinks' original to dust. Proof that raw power never gets old.

Keith Cameron

Leyton Oriental: Blur make the great leap forward.

Another crack at it

Britpop polymaths go east for reunion album. By Victoria Segal.

Blur

★★★★

The Magic Whip

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP

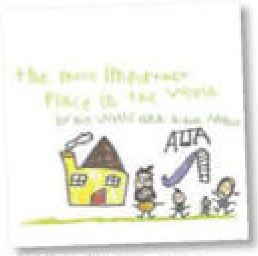
BROTHERHOOD WAS big during Britpop. The Gallaghers, obviously, always promised imminent rock'n'roll fratricide. Blur, despite lacking shared genes, weren't to be outdone. Each band member had one sister and no brothers, a dynamic, they said, that let them forge their own four-strong fraternity. Their relationship with their fans was like a sibling bond, too: Blur hugged their audience around the neck, punched their arm, let them tag along, grew up with them.

But grown-ups swap play fighting for adult battles, and *The Magic Whip* has come a long, melancholy way from the days when even Blur's slow songs were brash. It can claim to be their first 'proper' album since 1999's already bruised *13*: 2003's *Think Tank* featured heart-and-soul guitarist Graham Coxon only on Battery In Your Leg, the knowingly wistful "ballad for the good times". Fences mended, Blur reunited in 2009, but on maudlin lament My Terracotta Heart Damon Albarn notes how much has changed: "When we were more like brothers/But that was years ago."

The result of five days in a Hong Kong studio during a tour break, *The Magic Whip* solidified when Coxon worked on the tracks with producer Stephen Street, persuading the initially reluctant Albarn there was a Blur album in waiting. From the start, then, *The Magic Whip* seemed to hang by a thread, its fragile existence reflected in its tightly packed yet loosely bound sound, guitars, synthesizers and beats jostling like strangers in a busy street. The Hong Kong setting is more than an excuse for dubious 'exotic' Chinoiserie: for a record that struggles with missed beats and dropped connections, glassy modernity and urban blight, it's a fittingly humid, human backdrop. The skyscraping New World Towers has its foundations shaken by an ominous rumble, Albarn dreamily forecasting apocalypse from the rooftops; while Ghost Ship's languid soul unpacks its emotional cargo into "Kowloon emptiness" and ponders the need to "get away".

Pyongyang takes Albarn's trip to North Korea as inspiration for a twilight wander through dying empires. If the tone is elegiac, they can still sound like they are about to deliver a punchline: I Broadcast is Tracy Jacks with a selfie stick; Ong Ong a warm-hearted chant-along declaration of fidelity. Yet even the bubble-tea beats of Ice Cream Man, or Lonesome Street and Go Out, evoking their great hits, sound flattened by rubbish modern life, appalled by "greedy go getters" in luxury bars, let down by "talking types" with no answers. But for a collection with an eye on the setting sun and the slow decline, it's a fine late flowering. If they've made it, finally, to the end, there's nothing to regret here.

Tom Oldham



Bill Wells And Aidan Moffat

★★★★

The Most Important Place In The World

CHEMIKAL UNDERGROUND. CD/DL/LP

Falkirk's finest deliver a follow-up to the 2011 Scottish Album Of The Year.

On *Everything's Getting Older*, his award-winning debut with free-spirited jazzman Bill Wells, erstwhile Arab Strap voice Aidan Moffat pondered the E generation's belated adulthood: torn between recidivism and the bairns screaming in the back seat. The themes recur in the duo's second album, albeit refashioned as hymns to the city, whose lure – opener On The Motorway notes "her doors are open, her legs are spread" – proves stronger than a trip to Ikea. Wells has a myriad of tricks to spark his partner, like Lock Up Your Lambs' looped skronk, or the Jobim-styled Any Other Mirror, but the combination works best when Moffat's tart rumination is soundtracked by wee-hours piano études: the *noir* landscapes of This Dark Desire, or Far From You, a love letter to the domestic bliss our narrator not-so-secretly craves. More sharp work from these urban outfitters.

Keith Cameron

Alabama Shakes

★★★

Sound & Color

ROUGH TRADE. CD/DL/LP

Sophisticated, slightly belated offering after 2012's million-selling *Boys & Girls*.

A three-year lay-off is an eternity in internet-era rock, especially in these Deep Southerners' early-20 something demographic. While half of it was spent touring on the back of their initial success, Alabama Shakes aren't even denying they suffered a bit of a 'whitey' cutting this second record. But they dug deep. As per its title, *Sound & Color* is a good deal more ambitious than its rootsy predecessor. At a guess, singer Brittany Howard grew tired of being cast as some gender-switched Otis Redding shouter for the 2010s. It takes a few tracks for the band's trademark rasping Stax/Fame soul to surface – most notably on the chorus eruptions of Gimme All Your Love, and at Miss You's desperate climax. By contrast, Howard spends much of side one singing falsetto – think *What's Goin' On*, solo Curtis Mayfield – while the combo's fearsome chops are stretched via song structures of Jeff Buckley volatility. Less visceral than before, this one's a quintessential grower.

Andrew Perry

Will Butler

★★★★

Policy

COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Arcade Fire's 'class clown' records in the apartment Jimi Hendrix had at Electric Lady studios.

For those who felt AF's last album *Reflektor* had its longueurs (your scribe's hand is raised), let us prescribe this fabulously sure-footed solo debut by Will Butler, younger brother of the band's frontman, Win. Part feverish intensity (Take My Side), part apocalyptic dread humping Bowie circa *Scary Monsters* carnage (Something's Coming), and part exquisite Bill Fay/Leonard Cohen balladry (Finish What I Started), *Policy* is a dazzling execution of one man's crazed vision; a shape-shifter that sounds fuelled by delirium. Vocal inflections Lene Lovich would sanction (witness the line "Take out the knife!" on Anna), and operatic backing vocals tied to garage grit (What I Want) serve to further up the ante, and in 30 minutes it's all over. These eight, thrill-a-second songs – and Will/Owen Pallett's Oscar-nominated score for Spike Jonze's Her – underline that Butler junior's time is now.

James McNair

Tom Brosseau

★★★

Perfect Abandon

TIN ANGEL. CD/DL/LP

As if a young, blond Bruce Dern got lost in England and phoned home, a little drunk.

Touring the UK in 2014, North Dakota folkster Tom Brosseau passed through Bristol, pausing to record 10 songs with John Parish. The two revel in the ad hoc vibe, as Brosseau's glassy voice spins semi-plausible tales of "Tommy" (was he really abandoned in an out-of-state outlet store by his mother? Did he really become sexually obsessed with his landlady?) while his hillbilly flatpicking brings it on home, and shades of the Velvets' third haunt the fanciful Hard Luck Boy. The 'live' room reverb and in-the-moment urgency are bracing, and there's a hypnotic quality to the relentless building and verbal incontinence of Take Fountain and its ilk, but fans of last year's *Grass Punks* may miss some of that album's melodious economy. Tom Brosseau is great company and his risk-taking is admirable but "abandon", perfect or other-wise, is not his optimum look.

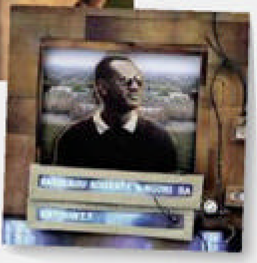
Danny Eccleston

TOM BROSSEAU

Bassekou Kouyaté: the Ba Power is in the roll.

Shake appeal

Kouyaté is on the road from Ségou to Seattle. By David Hutcheon.



Bassekou Kouyaté & Ngoni Ba

★★★★

Ba Power

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

IT WAS surely a nod to The Stooges when the Malian ngoni master Bassekou Kouyaté titled his band's fourth album, for the journey to recording it almost certainly took in *Raw Power* – the LP Kurt Cobain put at Number 1 in his list of influences on Nirvana's sound. In Kouyaté's hands, the little lute, with its skin made from the head of a cow, becomes every bit as thuggish as a distorted Les Paul.

When his second album, *I Speak Fula*, was picked up by Seattle's Next Ambiance label (part of Sub Pop) the man from Ségou began to move in different company. Imagine jumping from the world music milieu into a post-grunge state where *Nevermind* is Year Zero; rather than sit down to learn at the feet of a great-grandfather whose knowledge of court music stretches back through the Saharan sands of time, you simply stick *Led Zeppelin IV* on and see what you can cop from Black Dog.

Initially, this meant *Jama Ko*, a collection that puts the lie to the argument that nobody is writing protests songs today. Two years on, *Ba Power* – "ba" can mean both "group" and "strong" – is all about intensity, force and electricity. It begins at such a gallop on Siran Fen it's as if the engineer was too slow to catch the first notes, with the bass and rhythm ngonis locked together and the leader already reaching for his first solo; he reins himself in after around three minutes only as someone else (at a guess, guitarist Chris Brokaw) starts windmilling through a series of Townshend-like flamenco fills.

It's a sign that Kouyaté is looking for something different here. No matter what he did on previous albums, the music was rooted in the traditional sounds of central Mali. If he experimented with the blues, Cuban music or banjos, that was another project entirely. Those rules are obsolete now: there's a Middle Eastern feel to Musow Fanga (Power Of Women), which gives way to muted trumpet by Jon Hassell, who also supplies keyboards; Abé Sumaya is supplemented with avant-garde guitar playing; and the link to Zeppelin is completed by the presence of current Plant drummer Dave Smith.

Fortunately, given all the testosterone in that line-up, Ami Sacko, Kouyaté's wife, makes certain none of the blokey extra hard-rock oomph comes at the expense of the undeniably feminine feel always possessed by their group, a two-headed beast despite his name being out in front. This is primarily dance music, after all, and nobody gets to substitute sensual for savage on Sacko's watch. As far as Ngoni Ba are concerned, your rock can be as brutal, loud and raw as you like, but the power is, inescapably, all in the roll.

Toro Y Moi

★★★★

What For?

CARPARK. CD/DL/LP

Following a side project as Les Sins, the man once known as "Chaz" returns with a corker.

Chaz Bundick's debut, 2010's *Causers Of This*, unveiled a loose take on chillwave, since then Toro y Moi has been loosening up and shifting into a jazzier, funkier state of mind over two subsequent albums. But even then, *What For?*'s shift into the same gorgeous '70s AM rock as Mark Ronson's recent *Uptown Special* comes as a bit of a shock. Even more shocking is how well it works. With its chiming guitars, delay pedal psychedelics and unabashed clavinet, *What For?* is chamber pop filtered through a lava lamp haze, sharing the same touch points as Tame Impala or Ariel Pink. But what makes it extra special is Bundick's songwriting chops, which have never felt more unfettered. From the gentle piano leitmotifs of Ratcliff to the pre-funk licks of Spell It Out and the dreamy nuances on Half Dome the album is a retroactive joy from start to finish.

Priya Elan

Thomas Dorn

Buena Vista Social Club

★★★

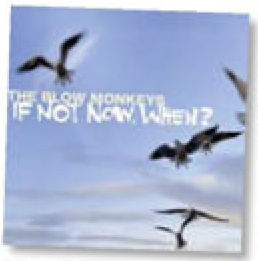
Lost And Found

WORLD CIRCUIT. CD/DL/LP

The veteran Cubans return once again, this time to tell you "Adios".

With the Club on their final tour (and 19 years older than when they recorded the most successful album in Cuban history), this can't help but feel like loose ends being tied up. Yet it is no ragbag collection, even if several tunes are little more than snippets, for at the height of their popularity, Ibrahim Ferrer, Compay Segundo et al were working hard to preserve their legacy. Indeed, the highlight may be Black Chicken 37, a jam featuring Miguel 'Anga' Díaz on congas and bassist Cachaíto; or you may plump for one of three live Ferrer boleros, recorded in 2000, the year he won a Latin Grammy for best newcomer at the ripe age of 72. Finally, as if to remind us how profound "lost and found" is when talking about the BVSC effect, pianist Rubén González is never far from firing off another immaculate solo.

David Hutcheon



The Blow Monkeys

★★★

If Not Now, When?

BLOW MONKEY MUSIC. CD/DL

Their fourth album adds some glam rock sparkle.

Since their reformation in 2008, The Blow Monkeys have operated as a sole vehicle for frontman Robert Howard aka Dr Robert – he produces and writes the 10 songs here. Touchstones are Roxy Music, T.Rex, also the first incarnation of The Blow Monkeys on the single release OK! Have It Your Way, a follow-up to It Doesn't Have To Be This Way, their 1987 Top 5 hit. With sha-la-la's and blasts of sax, it's a big, brassy backdrop for Howard's socialist agenda. The Sound Of Your Laughter and The Guessing Game are Get It On-style glitter boogies; by contrast Stay Now and All That Glitters reveal a more fragile side. The former, about the death of his father when Howard was just 17, is a gospel ballad, just him, guitar and piano; the second, a reflection on the madness of fame.

Lois Wilson

Nneka

★★★★

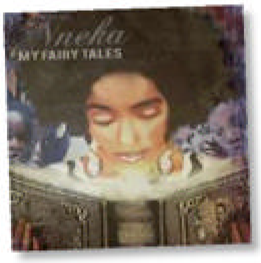
My Fairy Tales

BUSHQUEEN MUSIC. CD/DL

Confident fifth album from Nigerian singer channelling Fela Kuti and Bob Marley.

Ever since her 2005 debut *Victim Of Truth*, Nneka Egbuna has constructed a veritable fortress of challenging modern soul. A considerable star in her native Nigeria, who breached the UK charts in 2009 with the tensile earworm that was Heartbeat, Nneka's knack for sweetened agitprop over a shimmering mélange of reggae, R&B and Afrobeat has brought frequent comparisons to Erykah Badu and Lauryn Hill. If 2012's spritely yet existentially loaded *Soul Is Heavy* found Nneka overcoming her demons; *My Fairy Tales* reflects a new-found serenity. While socially conscious messages simmer beneath the bubbling African beats of Believe System and deep street funk of Babylon, they are delivered sensitively with a velvet cosh, while only the stone hearted would be unmoved by the invigorating uptown pop skank of My Love, My Love.

Andy Cowan



Brian Wilson

★★★

No Pier Pressure

CAPITOL. CD/DL/LP

Punningly titled 11th solo album flirts dangerously with modernity but yields handful of beauties.

Originally intended as a Beach Boys album and the follow-up to 2012's *That's Why God Made The Radio* (until the Wilson/Mike Love fault line cracked open once again), Brian repaired to Ocean Way Studios in Los Angeles with collaborator Joe Thomas to complete these songs under his own name. Tellingly, Al Jardine and David Marks return here, their harmonies shining in the gorgeously dreamy Whatever Happened, a drowning-in-nostalgia love letter to old haunts long disappeared. On The Island, featuring She & Him, stirs in some lightsome exotica, though the decision to add electro beats and EDM synths to Runaway Dancer rankles. Best of all is orchestral closer The Last Song, in which the 72-year-old Wilson's fragility as he sings "there's never enough time for the ones that you love" really tugs the heartstrings.

Tom Doyle

East India Youth

★★★★

Culture Of Volume

XL. CD/DL/LP

William Doyle raises the volume but preserves the charm on album number two.

Having secured widespread acclaim and a Mercury nomination for the 2014 debut he knocked up in his bedroom, William Doyle, aka East India Youth, has barely tinkered with the formula for his second full-length – a good thing, as his proprietary blend of homespun techno and forlorn songcraft proves fertile ground. The balance falls further in favour of songs over instrumentals on *Culture Of Volume* – though opening ambient vignette The Juddering and tribal techno assault Entirety are both highlights – and a grander sense of ambition is at play: the widescreen End Result, with its synthetic strings and sky walking synths, successfully imagines what a Bond theme by the Pet Shop Boys would sound like. Elsewhere, Hearts That Never plays angsty pop against fractal, tessellating synth-lines welded to an unfailing 4/4 beat, while the serene, impossibly beautiful Carousel sounds like David Sylvian crooning at the end of the world.

Stevie Chick

The Proclaimers

★★★★

Let's Hear It For The Dogs

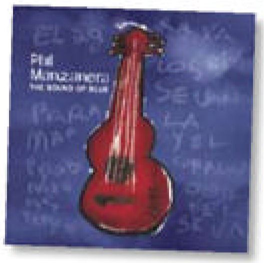
COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Scots national treasures show their teeth.

THE PROCLAIMERS
LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE DOGS

A surefire festival banker, a back catalogue long identified as an essential ingredient of Scotland's national psyche and even a stage show and feature film inspired by their music… it must be a quandary for Craig and Charlie Reid to avoid the straitjacket of becoming a much-loved but slightly cartoon heritage act with everyone waiting to hear I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) and Letter From America. Their response is a rocking album with producer Dave Eringa, full of ferocious choruses, powerful guitars, urgent drums, high production values and big, bouncy sing-alongs which attempt to out-anthem their own greatest hits. With sharp, witty, occasionally angry lyrics (Then Again; What School?), they come at you with blazing voices and buoyant melodies and if they sometimes sound just a little too bombastic, tracks like Rainbows & Happy Regrets, In My Home and Forever Young are tailor made to thrill any live audience.

Colin Irwin



Phil Manzanera

★★★★

The Sound Of Blue

EXPRESSION. CD/DL

Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera publishes his global musical diary.

There will be no new Roxy Music album. How can there be when Bryan Ferry makes records that sound so old, and Phil's so young? Of all the solo Manzanera albums post-Roxy Music, this is the most connected, the most likeable; guitars both proggy and jerkily post-punk, sexy, exotic electronic beats and the sort of melodies often absent from the multimillion-selling Floyd grand finale, *The Endless River*, which Manzanera played on and helped produce. Andy Mackay's here too, as is a new find, singer Sonia Bernardo. The beautiful opener Magdalena, named after his mother, is the album's most conventional moment; thereafter it's the spirit of early Roxy refracted through the prism of a multicultural life – the electro-heat of 1960 Caracas, the intoxication of Tramuntana and the witty In Conversation With Andy Mackay. It all ends with the only real vocal track, a riff-raiding cover of No Church In The Wild, the Jay-Z, Kanye West and Frank Ocean collaboration which had sampled Manzanera's own K-Scope.

David Buckley

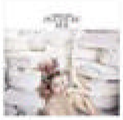
Hannah Cohen

★★★

Pleasure Boy

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Second collection of *jolie-laide* love songs from the former model.



In the video for Sorry, a track from Hannah Cohen's 2012 debut *Child Bride*, the singer-songwriter downed a load of pills, put a plastic bag over her head, and watched her life flash before her eyes in the form of aesthetically pleasing old home movies. Her second album doesn't up the merriment ante much: Cohen might have had an image rethink, but the platinum hair and '50s pin-up wear can't cover the pain at *Pleasure Boy*'s core. She shoots a heavy dose of Lana Del Rey-laced anaesthetic into the heart of Watching You Fall and Lilacs, while the jazz simmer of Queen Of Ice and Keepsake's electro-drama break through the soft-focus cocoon of betrayal and regret. Really, though, *Pleasure Boy* wants to luxuriate in its own sadness, an indulgence that Cohen shares out with dreamy self-absorption, looking in the mirror to see her tears fall.

Victoria Segal

Hannah Cohen, keeping the merriment in check.

Lulu

★★★

Making Life Rhyme

DECCA. CD/DL

A national treasure offers a mostly self-penned pleasure.

LULU
Making life Rhyme

Time yet again to re-evaluate Lulu's place in Britain's pop hierarchy. It's a pity that her commercial success via Eurovision and cabaret slots have been allowed to cloud judgement, while her Muscle Shoals recordings and other soulful exploits have been relegated to rock's backpages. Here, back on the label that first introduced her talents over 50 years ago, Lulu sounds as vital and feisty as ever. She's had a hand in writing most of the material, which includes an epic ballad in Cry, plus a Drifters-tinged ease-along named Heaven Help and a title track that edges forward on the back of a Stones-like riff. The borrowed fare on this occasion spans a take on Hendrix's Angel, a recall of the Burl Ives' favourite Wayfaring Stranger and a completely revamped Shout that effectively links swamp-rock with gospel. Impressive, all told. Did someone mention Glastonbury?

Fred Dellar

Fairport Convention

★★★

Myths And Heroes

MATTY GROVES. CD/DL

The folk rock veterans getting mellow.

Boldly (foolishly?) mirroring the sleeve design of one of their greatest albums, *Full House*, the folk rock veterans continue to feed hungrily off their illustrious heritage, valiantly keeping the flame burning with their first new album in four years – a selection of largely self-written contemporary songs, five of them by Chris Leslie. They may be a shadow of Fairports in their halcyon days, yet they still deliver with likeable clarity and there's real joy when they hit their stride, particularly on the instrumentals Fylde Mountain Time/Roger Bucknall's Polka and The Gallivant. Nothing to dislike about Leslie's melodic narrative songs – Love At First Sight, is an especially clever play on a familiar ballad theme about the female dressing as a man not to join the army, but a morris side – though nothing quite matches the mastery of Ralph McTell's Clear Water. A genteel album, more for mellow reflection than dancing on ceilings.

Colin Irwin

FAIRPORT CONVENTION

Foxy laddies: The Prodigy (from left) Maxim, Liam Howlett, Keith Flint.

Nocturnal mission

Liam Howlett's rave survivors say it extra-loud for the nighttime. By **Andrew Perry**.

The Prodigy

★★★★

The Day Is My Enemy

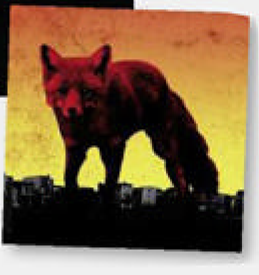
TAKE ME TO THE HOSPITAL/COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

DANCE MUSIC as we Brits once knew it is all but moribund in the 2010s, so The Prodigy's resistance to that trend identifies them as a unique breed of breakbeat-driven post-apocalyptic cockroach. However sporadic, their three albums since '97's epochal *The Fat Of The Land* have all been chart-toppers here. Apart from a brief wobble of inner disharmony circa 2002, the core trio – musical mastermind Liam Howlett and MCs Maxim Reality and Keith Flint – stuck together as UK pop's most enduring outsider heroes.

The stirring iconography for this sixth album casts them not as indestructible insektoids, but as a lone urban fox, eyes glowing blood red, feral and cruising the city limits to guard its own patch. A cool six years since 2009's *Invaders Must Die*, their vibe is fierce, unapologetic and – the buzzword in interviews thus far – angry.

Exactly what's fuelled this ill temper remains vague: unless they've been shaken down by dodgy accountants, the Prodge shouldn't have too much to complain about at this stage, but *The Day Is My Enemy* scarcely flags in its fury across 14 high-intensity tunes. Indeed, were this your chosen soundtrack while driving through any given British conurbation, you'd surely be snapped for 200-odd speed violations in the 56-minute running time.

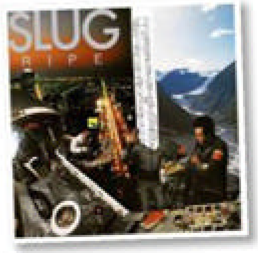
Set to a juddering military breakbeat made up of what sounds like shotgun loading mechanisms being ratcheted, the title track opens at full throttle, with guest Martina Topley Bird's stately, Ella Fitzgerald-inspired chorus rendition of Cole Porter's All Through The Night offset against chaotically squelching synth lines and terrifying screams of "get down, get down". This track reputedly lay around unfinished after the *Invaders Must Die* sessions: Howlett's methods of assembly are mysterious and at best patient, but few could doubt the potency of his end products.



In truth, not a great deal changes in mood or tempo from there on as crescendo follows breakdown follows crescendo, with a certainty that does justice to classic Status Quo. Flint-led assaults such as Rok-Weiler and Nasty border on punk/metal, while Destroy and Rhythm Bomb reconnect with the Prodge's roots, via the cheesey synths and helium voices of early rave.

It hardly feels like an interruption of normal service when Sleaford Mods' Jason Williamson pops up to ride Howlett's battering beats as swaggeringly as he does the Mods' own. The track in question, Ibiza, 'outs' superstar DJ's for pre-mixing sets in the Balearic dance capital – The Prodigy as custodians of proper ethics in club culture.

Towards the end, Medicine might've been culled for full-impact conciseness, but Wall Of Death closes at maximum warp factor, with Flint barking "fuck you and your heart attack". Overall, it's a robust, if somewhat exhausting, showing. Perhaps amusingly, the album's been picked up by Warners US. Suffice to say: the vacuous futurism of EDM this really isn't.



Slug

★★★★

Ripe

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES. CD/DL/LP

Field Music bassist, produced by FM brethren Peter and David Brewis.

The North-eastern seaside strip of Roker is most associated with slot machines and Sunderland FC. Slug commandant Ian Black aimed to import more exotic moods to the Brewis brothers' Roker studio – inspirations including James Brown, Madonna, Czech animator Jan Švankmajer and Brazilian-Italian horror film composer Claudio Simonetti. It is unclear how many of the above made it to Sunderland, but *Ripe* is a compelling, tersely funky 30 minutes. A strong suggestion of Field Music hovers in the subtly cerebral musical designs but there's also art-house brute power, as on the exhilarating Cockeyed Rabbit Wrapped In Plastic, suggesting Magazine when they turned their minds to Sly Stone. Amid the jagged funk-offs, a synthesized steel band (Weight Of Violence) and the odd keyboard étude (Peng Peng) colour a strong debut.

Roy Wilkinson

Gallows

★★★

Desolation Sounds

VENN. CD/DL/LP

UK hardcore firebrands' fourth delivers raw punk with a complex undertow.

Having lost frontman Frank Carter in 2011 before their third album and his brother, guitarist Steph, in 2013, stability has evaded Gallows of late, but you won't hear it in the scourging assault of *Desolation Sounds*. Their fourth LP is blisteringly confident as the band evolves toward maturity. Fans will be sated by the sheer wallop of Mystic Death and Leviathan Rot, their hairpin turns and head-on attack recalling Jane Doe-era Converge. More intriguing, though, are the tracks where a vulnerability and complexity peeks through the melee: the fiery gloom of Bonfire Season, vocalist Wade MacNeil musing he's "losing my desire to be in love with death", or the lacerating Chains, with its hook-laden chorus of "don't want no violent summer". Anyone thinking Gallows were losing their bite, however, is directed to Leather Crown, where MacNeil warns that he's been "patient for far too long" screaming like a one-man terrace choir. And here's the thing: he sounds like he really, really means it.

Stevie Chick

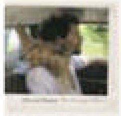
Olivia Chaney

★★★★

The Longest River

NONESUCH. CD/DL

Long-awaited debut album by Brit folk's great hope.



Much trumpeted as the coming force of Brit folk, Olivia Chaney's long-awaited debut album is a surprisingly stark yet passionate affair, with just enough unorthodoxy to suggest that a multilayered musician lurks at its root. At heart a singer-songwriter in the Joni tradition, she has a serious classical grounding with reference points that spread far and wide, and highlights of this collection include a frisky 17th century Henry Purcell ditty, a Spanish-language song by Chilean protest singer Violeta Parra and – the album's high point – Blessed Instant by Norwegian jazz/improv artist Sidsel Endresen, which benefits so greatly from its charged, dramatic arrangement it exposes the limitations of the minimalism that largely occupies the rest of the album. As sparse as they are, though, Chaney's guitar and piano accompaniments do emphasise the emotional weight of her own songs like The King's Horses and Holiday.

Colin Irwin

Drenge

★★★

Undertow

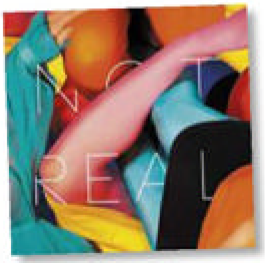
INFECTIOUS. CD/DL/LP

Derbyshire's Loveless brothers goth it up.

Many groups have a cross to bear – a drug habit, an inadequate drummer – but getting name-checked by a resigning Labour MP was a random blow for Eoin and Rory Loveless's Drenge. They'd been on the climb with their two-man garage-rock ruckus, via a 2013 self-titled debut which imagined early Black Keys with the blues fader dropped, or The Mighty Lemon Drops cured of their Doors fixation. But for Tom Watson MP's credibility-vaporising props, they might easily have found themselves in Royal Blood's shoes. Undaunted, their second outing makes no effort to remap their coordinates: they remain riffy, distorted, full of nocturnal energy, possessed of rollicking good tunes, but also open up a more expansive goth-rock strain on indie-radio cuts like Never Awake, and slow-burner The Woods. Bassist Rob Graham beefs things up on three tracks, feral We Can Do What We Want included. They're one mega-hit away from grown-up glory.

Andrew Perry

Paul Dugdale



Stealing Sheep

★★★★

Not Real

HEAVENLY. LP/CD/DL

Liverpool trio make a bold and creative leap into future-folk.

The chasm between folk and funk is one that few attempt to bridge, yet Stealing Sheep have done exactly that. Seamlessly shifting up a creative gear, they've re-appropriated wyrd-folk for the digital age. Without losing their essence they have also made a dance record. Over 10 miniature masterpieces the trio craft odd, brilliant and utterly English pop music; like Delia Derbyshire let loose on Kate Bush, or perhaps the yin to Wild Beasts' similarly exploratory and ethereal yang. From the soulful Prince-like synth-tones of Sequence through a sparse title track built with the same rhythmic economy of Grace Jones and the celestial, haunting shimmer of Love, odd tunings, *kosmische* flourishes, chilling harmonies, lap steel and triggered beats are this album's architecture. But here technology is merely a vessel for a sound that remains pastoral and beguiling. Truly, a class act.

Ben Myers

King Crimson

★★★★

Live At The Orpheum

DGM. CD+LP

Umpteenth line-up, now sporting three drummers, turbo-charges the back catalogue on a US tour.

After repeatedly assuring the world that the King Crimson project was dead, guitarist Robert Fripp returns with the most lively version for years. On paper, a seven-piece, percussion-heavy edition of the band seemed a dubious prospect. But in practice this line-up dances lightly on its feet, travelling from delicate gamelan textures to thunderous prog-metal. The band throw new light on music of all Crimson eras – from Sailor's Tale, with Fripp reeling off a solo of ferocious virtuosity, to The ConstruKction Of Light. And they close with a red-blooded Starless. Throughout, the drummers subtly co-operate rather than compete, and while Jakko Jakszyk isn't the most charismatic King Crimson singer, this band was always primarily about the instrumental clatter. If you don't mind the absence of new tunes, the only real complaint is that the set lasts a mere 41 minutes. Would like some more, please.

John Bungey

Stealing Sheep: bridging the folk-funk chasm

Lund

★★★

Flawed Heroine

BLOW THE FUSE. CD

Yes, named after the fab Danish sleuth with the nice line in jumpers.

Three women of some experience invented a band – in Margate, Kent. They had intended to make "a demo", but got very hot on the spot and did the album right there. They flow from ambient spaciness and spoken poetics (Sappho's Rock) to Buddy Holly jive (In Your Eyes) and assorted funk, Creamish heavitude, even reggae, all convincing, yet all outshone when, on Fallen, guitarist Deirdre Cartwright and drummer Ann Day channel the skippy-dippy Police sparkle of Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland. Diversity's no deficit because everything fits, no showy muso bumptiousness. The unruly element in Lund is singer-lyricist Sarah P who seems fine on romance and sex but can lose her earthiness to somewhat grandiose, prog-reminiscent concerns – the lonely boy in Fallen, the war widow in Raw. Still, more often she follows her own instruction to "Leave your head outside with your shoes" (Bliss Dance) and lets go with fire and flair.

Phil Sutcliffe

Speedy Ortiz

★★★★

Foil Deer

CARPARK. CD/DL/LP

Follow-up to 2013's *Major Arcana*, co-produced by Nicolas Vernhes.

With math-rock chops and an instinct for off-centre pop, Speedy Ortiz have earned a name for intelligent screeds of '90s-minded angst. On this second full album they lurch between plaid-smothered unresolved chords and frontwoman Sadie Dupuis's verbose story-telling, delivered deadpan *à la* early Liz Phair. "I was the best at being second place, but now I'm just the runner up/And being only the second one you think of everyday before you go back to one," goes the Pavement-ish tongue-twister chorus of The Graduates. In both Ginger and Zig, Dupuis's lavishly worded portraits of early-twenties slackers are drawn with a bookish clarity and wit, but when they venture further afield – on murder ballad My Dead Girl and reverse domestic abuse track Mister Difficult – they show how far she's moved into the murky world of grown ups.

Priya Elan

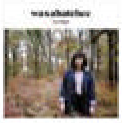
Waxahatchee

★★★★

Ivy Tripp

WICHITA. CD/DL/LP

Her "quarter life crisis" record; named in part after a friend who passed away.

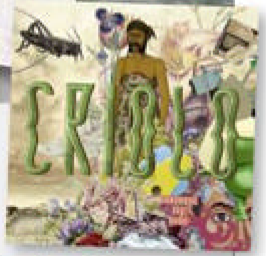


On her third album, Katie Crutchfield has had it. After the bittersweet twang of 2013's *Cerulean Salt* that mixed Faulknerian lyrics with the lunging hooks of Belly, *Ivy Tripp* finds her tentatively inching towards the future. On the Pretenders-ish Grey Hair she salutes her own fame with a stomach full of nerves and sarcastic doubt ("Maybe you'll learn to live on stage… aybe American kids will start a craze… maybe") while on the nursery rhyme-like piano waltz Half Moon her relationship quakes beneath the surface ("Our love tastes like sugar but it pulls the life out of me"). *Ivy Tripp* is a complicated, slow-burning wonder that matches *Cerulean Salt* for fuzzy, bed-headed zingers (Under A Rock, Poison, the organ-driven La Loose) but adds several layers of regret and self doubt and is all the more rewarding for that.

Priya Elan

WORLD

BY DAVID HUTCHEON



Criolo

★★★★

Convoque Seu Buda

STERN'S. CD/DL/LP

Socially conscious statement from the Brazil that you never see on the beaches of Rio.

RAISED IN a São Paulo favela shack with a mud floor, Kleber 'Criolo' Gomes broke through four years ago when *Nó Na Orelha* caught the ear of the Brazilian public and older musical heroes such as Caetano Veloso, who rushed to endorse the latest hip hop wonderkid (who actually turned out to be in his mid-thirties). As befits an album title that translates as "Invoke Your Buddha", there is a hint of the Far East in samples on the opening track, but the focus is on musicians playing live, and mixing styles (samba, reggae, Brazilian MPB, a bit of Afrobeat, jazz), while Criolo laments the way his country allowed itself to sell out to the dollar and the Xbox to jerry-build a modern façade. As a singer, there's a strong hint of Gilberto Gil in his voice, which goes a long way to sweeten the anger.

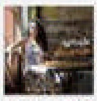
ALSO RELEASED

Namvula

★★★

Shiwezwa

NAMVULA. CD/DL



Self-composed and self-released, Namvula Rennie's debut is an upliftingly jazzy take on Africana and a powerful attempt to discover the Zambian roots she had been separated from during a childhood in Europe (she is half-Scottish, which explains some of the folkier elements). The musicians include the cream of two continents' jazz exponents, but it's the star's voice that really captivates.

The Very Best

★★★★

Makes A King

MOSHI MOSHI. CD/DL/LP

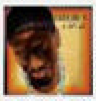
The third album by the Swedish-Malawian duo who started in an east London junkyard begins with a drowsy dub feel and closes with a southern-African gospel-trance euphoria – both extremes of an East End Sunday morning, in other words. Recorded in a village on the shore of Lake Malawi, it's a huge step forward on their earlier recordings.

Carlou D

★★★

A New Day

WORLD VILLAGE. CD/DL



Part hip hop, part soul, part Senegalese pop, Carlou D's is a very 21st century Esperanto, as befits an album recorded in Dakar and Sweden and featuring a world-champion accordionist and Britney Spears' guitarist. It's obvious D is mining a spiritual groove, and his falsetto is impressive, but his regular singing voice can be a nasal drone that struggles to express emotion.

Samba Touré

★★★★

Gandadiko

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

The Saharan guitarist has been promising to deliver a set as strong as *Gandadiko* for a couple of albums, but this really is the business. Dark, minatory rhythms underpin stark lyrics telling of hard times in the north of Mali. Brilliantly deep stuff, too, well beyond the ken of outsiders: the words of Gafoure remain un-translated "for your own security". *DH*

Caroline Bittencourt

Radical makeover: Cassandra Wilson takes on Holiday.

Mark Seliger

Aidan Baker

★★★★

Half Lives

GIZEH. CD/DL

Nadja multi-instrumentalist feeds 10 years of musical experiment into double CD.

After 2013's *Already Drowning* saw the workaholic Aidan Baker sculpting his amorphous ambient textures into a conceptual song-cycle about female water sprites featuring the vocals of Jessica Bailiff, Carla Bozulich and Geneviève Castrée, *Half Lives* finds the Canadian polymath splicing bright layers of guitar abstractions into frail sparkling structures designed to contain his own delicate wind-blown vocals. CD1, *Mountains Sweat Clouds*, features mainly electric guitar while CD2, *As I Walked On Dead Earth*, is largely acoustic, yet both CDs possess the same luminous intensity, hypnotic patterning of guitar with organ, synths, field recordings, and distant jazz drumming that, with the addition of Baker's own doomy layered vocals, give both albums the same powerfully eerie feel; a chilly electric vividness, like seeing a working pinball machine blinking and flashing at the bottom of a frozen forest lake.

Andrew Male

Villagers

★★★★

Darling Arithmetic

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Recorded in Malahide to the north of Dublin, it's Conor O'Brien's most intimate album.

From flushed pink to the faded grey on the third Villagers album, Conor J. O'Brien explores the changing colours of love. Written and recorded at home, the album has the feel of an epic treatise on the theme: with O'Brien running the gamut from one night-stand shelf lurker (No One To Blame) and post-coital dewy (Dawning On Me) to resentful (Hot Scary Summer) and widowed (Darling Arithmetic). It's a risky exercise but O'Brien pulls it off thanks to his trademark musical economy: succinct lyrical couplets ("Left my demons at the door/So what are you opening it for?" on Every Thing I Am Is Yours) that resonate deeply, a voice that recalls Will Oldham's quiver and Bill Callahan's deadpan. An ominous Daniel Lanois-like production lends these stripped-back tracks a suggestion of past ghosts and future regrets that lurk just beneath the surface.

Priya Elan

Cassandra Wilson

★★★★

Coming Forth By Day

COLUMBIA/LEGACY. CD/DL

Mississippi singer's Billie Holiday tribute.

With her smouldering sensuality and languorous, smoky timbre, 59-year-old Cassandra Wilson possesses one of the most distinctive voices in jazz. Since the early 1990s, Grammy-winning Wilson has forged a unique musical path, distilling jazz, country, soul and blues influences into a singular personal style that resists easy classification. This, the chanteuse's Columbia debut, is expertly helmed by the Nick Cave/Arcade Fire producer, Nick Launay, who helps Wilson craft a respectful homage to Holiday (who would have been 100 this year) that is far from predictable and orthodox. Wilson explores 11 Holiday-associated songs – among them the immortal Good Morning Heartache and Strange Fruit – consciously avoiding jazz clichés via a musical approach that is both fearlessly original and frames her voice with unorthodox arrangements. It's a radical makeover, certainly, but one that elicits fresh emotional insight from antique songs.

Charles Waring

The Leisure Society

★★★★

The Fine Art Of Hanging On

FULL TIME HOBBY. CD/DL/LP

A fourth instalment of Nick Hemming's heroically diverse pop.

The Leisure Society were once part of the flood of quasi-folkies trailing in the narcotic wake of Mumford & Sons and Fleet Foxes. Things livened up with third album *Alone Aboard The Ark*, where retro synths flirted with jazz; now, hallelujah, melodies and lyrics are not just sensitive but sharp and witty, glittering with a dazzle reminiscent of Britpop at its deftest – a poignant cocktail of Jarvis Cocker, Carl Barât, even Ray Davies. A friend of vocalist Nick Hemming was battling cancer as Hemming wrote this; it came to tell the tale of that lost fight. The title track is triumphant with golden brass; The Undefeated Ego is a Tennessee waltz; and I'm A Setting Sun shakes up Stax, rockabilly and '70s glam. And closer As The Shadows Form is heart-in-mouth acoustic, Hemming as eloquent as Rufus Wainwright.

Glyn Brown

K-X-P

★★★★

III Part I

ÖM/SVART. CD/DL/LP

Eccentric Finnish trance-techno fusion with ritualistic overtones.

Late last year, K-X-P issued The History of Techno. The EP exalted the music's "lizard brain information". Now, with their third album, the loopy Finns continue their journey towards the primal by conjuring up a musical suite that – notwithstanding its electronic inclination – could accompany an ancient shamanic ritual. Initially a hybrid of glam stompiness and acid house bloops, K-X-P have evolved (ironic, considering their regressive tendencies) into a techno-crazed counterpart to the KLF. *III* is overtured by Psychic Hibernation which takes Tangerine Dream deep into a cave to meet trance-afflicted drummers. Suddenly, those present begin shuffling to Space Precious Time, chanting the title while looking towards the light. It peaks with Descend To Eternal. While it is impossible to listen to *III* without ritual imagery coming to mind, the album might also spark a boom in the sale of pagan garb.

Kieron Tyler

Mount Eerie

★★★★

Sauna

P.W. ELVERUM AND SUN. CD/DL/LP

Conceptual double LP about sweat-rooms and the loss of self from Washington-based drone poet.

It starts in the literal, the sound of cold breath and the crackle of hot stones. After four minutes of deep organ drone come washes of guitar noise, birdsong, the hiss of steam, dripping water and a vocal that invites us "Out past beyond the field inside the birches… [to] a small room". Here, inside Phil Elverum's Anacortes, Washington sauna the listener is transported out of the grounded human world and into the vast elemental void. Incorporating elements of black metal, post MBV indie-rock, girl-group harmonies, gamelan chimes, prepared piano, acoustic guitar prettiness, serialism and that ever-present organ drone, *Sauna* becomes a transitional journey of self-surrender, Elverum's spoke-sung imagist perceptions ("A tractor idling two blocks away/In the fog") slowly reaching towards a quiet, meditative transcendence.

Andrew Male

Stornoway

★★★★

Bonxie

COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Their first record with an outside producer, Gil Norton of Foo Fighters/Pixies note.

Named for the sobriquet of bellicose seabird the great skua, *Bonxie* is an ornithology and ecology-themed record to lose yourself in; the songs Stornoway linchpin Brian Briggs penned in his Gower Peninsula-parked, storm-lashed camper van looking all the way to the horizon. If vocal harmony-rich sea shanty Josephine and steady soarer Between The Saltmarsh And The Sea flag Briggs's lovely timbre overlap with The Seekers' Judith Durham, then Stornoway's sure-footed folk sensibility gets an '80s synth makeover on Get Low, even if its lyrics detail odd shoes found on the beach. Fans of BBC Radio 4's Tweet Of The Day will enjoy unearthing the album's 20 different bird-calls, but it's *Bonxie*'s heart, soul and natural world-inspired epiphanies that charm most. "Sometimes when you get to the summit/You will see another hill to climb", notes stand-out track The Road You Didn't Take.

James McNair

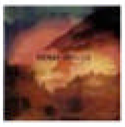
Denai Moore

★★★★

Elsewhere

BECAUSE MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

She's not the new Adele, more like the 21st century Joan Armatrading.



The Jamaican-born, Stratford-raised Denai Moore could easily find work as a soul stylist, but she plays piano (see opener Piano Song) and says folk music was her salvation, which gives her debut a genuinely different slant. The mood is restrained, plaintively blue rather than melodramatic or torrid, with no vocal retreat into melisma or even Sam Smith lip-wobble. Main producer Rodaidh McDonald (The xx, SBTRKT) similarly casts sparse shadows; the way he resists a full-on Stax ballad blast for No Light is as masterful as Moore's simmering plea. She may not over-emote but *Elsewhere* still has burn marks around its emotional edges, with titles such as Flaws and Detonate, whose backdrops slip between James Blake torchiness and the lush despondency of '60s show-downs in the mould of Plan B, who produces two tracks – Feeling and current single Blame – the latter showing she can master heart-in-mouth anthems too.

Martin Aston

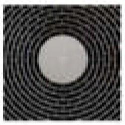
Wire

★★★

Wire

PINKFLAG. CD/DL/LP

The durable art-punks back with their thirteenth album.



2013's *Change Becomes Us* found Wire revisiting abandoned material from their often-dissonant 1980s, and finding avant-pop gold among the angular debris. This follow-up builds on the sound of its predecessor, with newbie guitarist Matthew Simms (a mere three decades younger than his band-mates) key to the record's chiming, propulsive sound. If nothing here quite reaches the hook-laden heights of Outdoor Miner or Kidney Bingos, there are plenty of sunlit avant-pop uplands, most notably on the plangent, almost baroque-pop Burning Bridge, with Colin Newman's vocals at their most deadpan and Syd Barrett-like. Lyrically, Wire remain inscrutably cryptic, although a teasing humour is occasionally apparent, as on opener Blogging, a fairly unambiguous critique of online culture ("Blogging like Jesus/Tweet like a pope"), and indeed, everything here is proof that Wire, approaching their 40th anniversary, are very far from being done.

David Sheppard

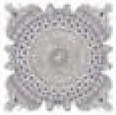
Dean McPhee

★★★★

Fatima's Hand

HOOD FAIRE/BLAST FIRST PETITE. CD/DL/LP

West Yorkshire-based solo electric guitarist's long-awaited second album.



As a perfectionist improviser, Dean McPhee is a contradiction in terms. Recording live with no overdubs through valve amp and effects pedals, McPhee can make his Fender Telecaster sound like an overheated vacuum tube computer, a huge metal door opening upon a room of baying hounds, or a steel harp warping in the parched desert. Support slots for Thurston Moore and Michael Chapman have incorporated everything from folk and dub to the harmonics of Tony Iommi and Sonny Sharrock. The follow-up to 2011's *Son Of The Black Peace*, *Fatima's Hand* is, like the titular Middle Eastern amulet, a thing of intricate protective beauty: 35 minutes unfold with steady serenity, blending English lute brightness with the ghostly twilight resonance of the oud, like some '70s hippy trail epiphany between pastoral Cambridge and the caravan cities of Syria.

Andrew Male

Colleen

★★★★

Captain Of None

THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

French multi-instrumentalist Cécile Schott (aka Colleen) relocates her delicate string arpeggios to world of dub.

Like her previous outing, 2013's *The Weighing Of The Heart*, Colleen's sixth album is essayed largely on the plucked, gut-stringed viola da gamba; *Captain Of None*, however, proves to be an album significantly unlike any of the San Sebastian-based Frenchwoman's previous work. With ground-shaking bass, playful electronic delay effects and, at times, febrile percussion underpinning and framing her rippling viola cadences, this is as indebted to Lee Perry and Augustus Pablo as it is Moondog, Arthur Russell or the various African musics from which she has previously drawn influence. Largely instrumental, the album is interspersed with haiku-like song fragments whose abstract lyrics read like texts from a dream, bewitchingly so on the percussively propulsive This Hammer Breaks and distinctly Jamaican-flavoured Eclipse, and, indeed, the whole thing carves out and inhabits a persuasively exotic world of echo that invites total immersion.

David Sheppard

Raekwon

★★★

F.I.L.A. (Fly International Luxurious Art)

ICEH20. CD/DL/LP

Wu-Tang Clan renegade targets mainstream thrills with mixed results.

Raekwon's first cuts were his deepest. Author of one of hip-hop's most singular epistles in 1995's *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, The Chef's trenchant, highly quotable style of street criminology hasn't always fared well beyond the stylistic confines of murky orchestral stabs and grimy soul samples. After publicly downing tools when Wu-Tang Clan reunited in 2013, castigating producer RZA for conjuring up "mediocre shit", his sixth solo offering is a surprisingly mainstream jolly. Horn-blasted tales of dodgy deals (4 In The Morning, Live To Die) and a crackling cine-matic alliance with Snoop Dogg (1, 2, 1, 2) are as tender and rich as Chateaubriand, but gristly duets with Estelle and the ubiquitous 2 Chains prove he's perfectly capable of cooking up mediocre shit under his own steam.

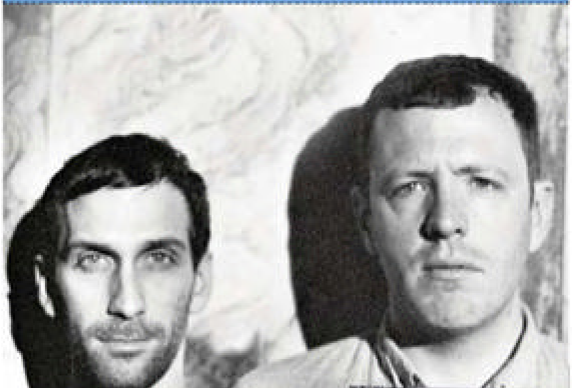
Andy Cowan

Colleen: inviting total immersion.

Estudio Primo

ELECTRONICA

BY STEPHEN WORTHY



Walls

★★★★

Urals

ECSTATIC. CD/DL/LP

Anglo-Italian acid droners duo sign off in flamboyant style.

SAM WILLIS and Alessio Natalizia have travelled a long way together over the past half decade – to a distant corner of the cosmos, in fact, passing through the techno and indie rock galaxies on their way. Fittingly, Walls splash down for the final time by completing a triptych of albums with their most rounded and effervescent of the three. The now familiar Walls touchstones remain intact – Krautrock drone, combative techno thrashes, skirling guitars and melodic ambience – except they're frequently pushed up to +11. The influence of Sonic Boom, who again takes on mastering duties, is readily apparent in the arpeggiated guitar and lysergic hum that envelops Voluta. Given the valedictory nature of *Urals*, the only drag is that it's doubtful we'll ever see the likes of bubbling, robot-acid freakout I Can't Give You Anything But Love get the sort of improvised live airing it deserves.

ALSO RELEASED

Lapalux

★★★★

Lustmore

BRAINFEEDER. CD/DL/LP

Citing film sound-tracks as inspiration is hardly new, but Stuart Howard's second album as Lapalux finds him percolating filmic moods through his blend of muzzy, languid hip hop and deep-burnt electronic soul. Amid indistinct background dialogue, ambient noise and slow-moving beats, Howard summons up the spirit of Vangelis's Blade Runner, Wendy Carlos's work on The Shining and John Carpenter to create a heavy-hitting, sedu-ctively love-drunk sound.

George Fitzgerald

★★★

Fading Love

DOUBLE SIX. CD/DL/LP

George Fitzgerald personifies the eclectic, magpie approach of British dance music. Garage, bass-driven deep house and, increasingly, techno have coursed through his productions, as well as hooks bordering pop. Tackling the album format finds the latter to the fore. It's a record which benefits from a pervasive electro-melancholia induced by quaking analogue synths, dulcet arpeggios and fragile vocals, recalling fraternal, dark electro-pop mavens Disclosure.

Uffe

★★★★

Radio Days

TARTELET. DL/LP

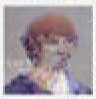
Danish producer Uffe Christensen one day hopes to make a jazz record but his decision to adopt a broader approach, taking in gauzy hip hop, stoned soul and lush Detroit house makes an enchanting debut here. The ping-pong rhythm and tremulous bass shuffle beneath My Luv Was Reel proves a refreshingly quirky approach to the dancefloor – but the frazzled down-tempo excursions of such as For A While linger longest.

Dave DK

★★★★

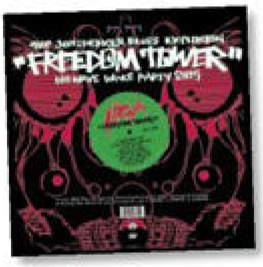
Val Maira

KOMPAKT. CD/DL/LP



A warm glow ema-nates from David Krasemann's third studio album, his first for Kompakt. His relationship with the Cologne label feels like the perfect fit as his brooding, sinuous electronic grooves are sprinkled with ambient glitter. It's exemplified on Halma, whose stuttering loop and granular percussion owe much to Gold Panda, a recipe he twists by adding soulful pads and delay on the meandering, blissed-out Nueva Cancion. *SW*

"Flee to the outskirts": LoneLady Julie Campbell heads for the hills.



The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

★★★★

Freedom Tower – No Wave Dance Party 2015

BRONZE RAT. CD/DL/LP

Blues Explosion visit the Daptone House Of Soul.

It was inevitable that the Blues Explosion would evolve beyond riffs, beats and righteous hollering about bellbottoms, but it was hard not to miss the thrill of their early contortions when they moved on to actual songwriting with 1998's *ACME*. Spencer himself seemed to concur, later forming Heavy Trash, whose messy rockabilly echoed the chaos of yore. *Freedom Tower*, though, strikes the happiest balance between their early anarchy and more mature leanings in years – not so feral as 2012's *Meat + Bone*, and possessing a welcome sense of funk. Recorded at Brooklyn's Daptone House Of Soul, *Freedom Tower* pares the group back to the elements, the razor-wire riffs some of their best (the restless Born Bad; the falling-down-the-stairs punk of The Ballad Of Joe Buck; the chicken-scratch Bellevue Baby), while Spencer's holler sounds as grease-slicked and super-cool as ever, suggesting Brylcreem possesses remarkable anti-aging properties.

Stevie Chick

Mini Mansions

★★★★

The Great Pretenders

ELECTROMAGNETIC/FICTION. CD/DL

US pop alchemists' second LP, on T Bone Burnett's label.

The warm, breezy opener Freakout! underlines Mini Mansions' assertion that they first bonded over a love of late Beatles, early Big Star and ELO. Then come two tracks – the synth-pop groove of Death Is A Girl and the fuzz-shot Creeps – that echo Sparks and T.Rex respectively, confirming the LA trio's ability to draw on pop's broad panoply on this finely crafted second set. The presence of Brian Wilson, singing backing vocals on the languid, bass-driven Any Emotions, and Arctic Monkeys' Alex Turner's distinct, semi-spoken word passage on the star-kissed melancholia of Vertigo suggest Mini Mansions have friends in high places. But the threesome – current QOTSA bassist Michael Shuman (guitar, vocals), Zach Dawes (drums, bass) and Tyler Parkford (vocals, keyboard) – have made an album whose wider appeal reaches for powerpop nirvana.

Phil Alexander

Bristol

★★★

Bristol

KAWAIDAN. CD/DL

Nouvelle Vague's Marc Collins tackles trip-hop.

Over three albums, Nouvelle Vague notably recast punk/new wave memorabilia as '60s yé-yé/bossa nova. Co-founder Marc Collin has now aimed to give '90s trip-hop a '60s soundtrack bent. The predominantly French guest crooners and Collin's sonic spectrum are suitably sophisticated and the tunes deftly chosen, but the ideological gap between source and remodel is far narrower this time; wasn't one of trip-hop's roots already '60s soundtracks? Thus Bristol's version of Portishead's Roads retains the same sepulchral mood and metre. Collin's brief appears far looser here: Morcheeba's Moog Island is coated with reggaefied Grace Jones brio rather than, say, Thomas Crown Affair insouciance, while his take on Tricky's Overcome is indistinguishable from Nouvelle Vague hauteur. Lose the concept, though, and a sequence of Goldfrapp's Paper Bag, Sneaker Pimps' 6 Underground and Björk's All Is Full Of Love (never trip-hop) as austere, nuanced drama has its place.

Martin Aston

Portico

★★★★

Living Fields

NINJA TUNE. CD/DL/LP

Former jazz quartet make winning transition to electronica trio.

Five years ago, then billed as Portico Quartet, the band bagged a Mercury Prize nomination for their contemporary jazz album *Knee-Deep In The North Sea*. Since then they've lost founder member Nick Mulvey to a solo career, but more significantly than any name or line-up change is the paradigm shift that Jack Wyllie, Duncan Bellamy and Milo Fitzpatrick have undertaken on *Living Fields*. Out go squealing sax solos and acoustic bass, replaced by swirling synths and somnolent beats. Hints of their future were evident on 2011's self-titled follow-up to *Knee-Deep…* – notably the twinkly, menacing Lacker Boo – but the only vestigial trace of Portico's jazz roots is the complex mesh of improvised melodies inhabiting each track. Three vocalists – Jono McCleery, Jamie Woon and alt-j's Joe Newman – provide added clout, with McCleery's performance on the grand but sombre Colour Fading and Newman's contribution to the stand-out 101, a haunting, electro-soul hymn, especially compelling. *Living Fields* is no instant hit, but the twilight world you're eventually drawn into is difficult to leave.

Stephen Worthy

LoneLady

★★★★

Hinterland

WARP. CD/DL/LP

Influenced by Rufus and Arthur Russell, Julie Campbell's second album, co-produced by Bill Skibbe.

Has anyone made 'the groove' sound more foreboding than Julie Campbell? On her second album, her funky motorik riffs provide the defence against the industrial warfare that's going on beneath her feet. "My world is under the rubble," she sings on Mortar Remembers You, while the no wave hymn Flee! captures a specific state of flight ("The ground is crumbling, the sky is falling… flee to the outskirts… please hurry"). Instead of the minimalism of 2010's *Nerve Up*, she's multi-layered her songs, mixing themes such as agoraphobia and cabin fever with songs like the title track, which hinges on a cello riff and features semi-rapping. The result is a fresh-sounding album that never lets up its twisted tension. In fact, with its four-to-the-floor pace, Bootsy-style bass lines meshing against grim visions of dystopia, *Hinterland* feels less like the spirit of the dance floor and much more like the crush of a weaponised march.

Priya Elan

Peter Broderick

★★★★

Colours Of The Night

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

First album in three years by the 28-year-old Oregonian polymath, recorded in Lucerne, Switzerland.

A multi-instrumentalist who has collaborated with everyone from Zooey Deschanel to Nils Frahm, dabbled in everything from post-classical composition to electronic pop, and the possessor of a pliantly soulful voice, Broderick is only a disco project away from being the Arthur Russell *de nos jours*. *Colours Of The Night* finds him in singer-songwriter mode, its 10 redemptive songs – written after serious burn-out following seven peripatetic years living and touring in Europe – oscillating between Americana, baroque chamber balladry and unabashed pop. Thus the wonderfully drowsy opener Red Earth comes on like a less wavering Will Oldham, The Reconnection makes an effervescent alloy of Sufjan Stevens and David Byrne, and the nostalgic, strings and woodwind-embellished Our Best has the heart-sore authenticity of Gram Parsons at his most tender. The vaguely Daryl Hall-recalling Get On With Your Life, meanwhile, may be the most unequivocal post-break-up song ever penned.

David Sheppard

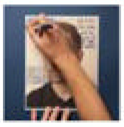
Lieutenant

★★

If We Kill This Thing We're All Going To Eat For A Week

DINE ALONE. CD/DL

Foo Fighters/Sunny Day Real Estate bassist Nate Mendel makes solo debut.



"Once the celery is out of the soup you're [often] left holding a stringy, watery vegetable," says Mendel, highlighting his aversion to solo albums by folks in famous bands. Brave, then, that he's sticking his head above the parapet with Lieutenant. While Mendel's main earner, the Foos, were tracking *Sonic Highways* on weekdays, he returned to the band's Studio 606 on weekends, shaping the quietly ambitious, stylistically flighty *If We Kill This Thing…* with heavy friends such as drummer Joe Plummer (The Shins, Modest Mouse), guitarist Page Hamilton (Helmet), and fellow Foo Chris Shiflett. Though zesty powerpop opener Belle Epoque certainly soars, it's largely diminishing returns thereafter. Mendel's quietly mixed 'sideman' vocals and oddball conflations (Sink Sand packs Aerosmith-like horn parts, slacker-indie guitars and somewhat opaque vocal melodies) make it hard to connect with a record which, though obviously heartfelt, never sounds unified.

James McNair

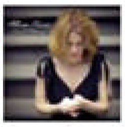
Allison Moorer

★★★★

Down To Believing

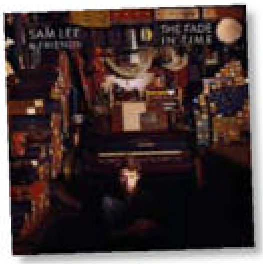
PROPER. CD/DL

Blame, shame and hope, melodically served.



Moorer's had it tough. Life began with the murder-suicide of her parents. More recently, the Alabaman has faced up to the end of a marriage (to Steve Earle) and raising an autistic son. Illogically but perhaps understandably, she blames herself for the latter's condition, a belief that has led to the creation of the best song on this album – Mama Let The Wolf In. Unstoppable swamp-rock, it has Moorer, wringing her hands at her misfortune and defiantly dishing out expletives to describe 'the wolf', the source of her despair. A brilliant, gut-wrenching song, it's accompanied by other personal treatises like the title track, a waltz that traces the decline of her marriage, and a self-explanatory crowd-pleaser, I'm Doing Fine. If the album has a fault it's in sequencing, with some of stronger moments low in the pecking order.

Fred Dellar



Sam Lee & Friends

★★★★

The Fade In Time

NEST COLLECTIVE. CD/DL

Second album by singer who travels Britain to rediscover ancient gypsy songs.

Sam Lee's musical archaeology might sound like a worthy project of interest only to be-jumpered folkies, yet this outstanding record deserves a wide hearing. While The Unthanks or, say, King Creosote with Jon Hopkins have found new ways of updating folk styles, no one is as daring as Lee. Building on the approach of his Mercury-nominated debut, *Ground Of Its Own*, Lee sets simple, rustic tunes in lush, dreamlike arrangements. Songs of love, death and poaching unfurl over snatches of Japanese court music or a Tajikistan wedding march. On Bonny Bunch, Lee is accompanied eerily by an archive recording of an eastern European cantor singer. It's perhaps no surprise that a fellow world traveller, Arthur Jeffes of Penguin Cafe, is producing. And even if purists find the whole baroque confection too much, they will have to admit there's never been a record quite like this.

John Bungey

NADINE SHAH
FAST FOOD

Nadine Shah

★★★

Fast Food

APOLLO. CD/DL/LP

The follow-up to her raved over debut.

Tyneside-born of Pakistani-Norwegian parents, Nadine Shah burst onto the scene two years ago and, with her baroque tales of revenge and regret, was hailed as the love child of Nick Cave and P.J. Harvey. There was much brooding menace and acoustic industrial, and things have not developed significantly. The title track opens with clanking metal and what sounds like Siouxsie Sioux's drop-dead vocal, but minus the Banshees' direction or melody. Fool is promising, about an affected poseur ("You, my sweet, are a fool"), but Matador is a relentless tone poem and, again, untroubled by any sort of hook. Divided, at last, stops the clanging repetition and makes way for a dark, operatic croon backed by a simple, affecting arrangement. Living is as good – booming drums, off-kilter howls, visceral and urgent. Otherwise, might a little less aggrieved gothic pomp work?

Glyn Brown

Calexico

★★★

Edge Of The Sun

CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

Nine albums in, the Arizona duo's passports are by now well thumbed.

Such is the familiarity of Calexico's border-crossing blend of Americana, Latino, country and more, it seems as if their music has existed far longer than the two decades in which Joey Burns and John Convertino have been operational. Inspired by a trip to Mexico City, *Edge Of The Sun* offers no real surprises, but it is perhaps their poppiest set yet. It's also Calexico's most collaborative work, with members of Iron & Wine and Band Of Horses pitching in on these short songs of hope. On Bullets & Rocks they go about business at their own meandering, sun-baked pace and Moon Never Rises is imbued with all the lovelorn romance of the mariachi that they do so well. The horn-laden, electro squelch of Cumbia de Donde, meanwhile, is a particular highlight, a reminder that Calexico are best when drawing old and new worlds together.

Ben Myers

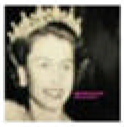
Morton Valence

★★★★

Another Country

BASTARD RECORDINGS. CD/DL

Londoners celebrate 10 years' work with a definitive 'urban country' adventure.



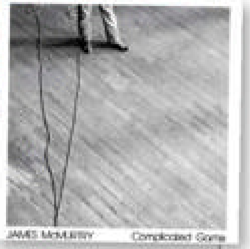
Six years since the narrative art pop of debut *Bob & Veronica*, Morton Valence have perfected their unusual fusion of inner city strife with instrumentation from below the Mason-Dixon Line. The evolving child of bellicose songwriter Robert 'Hacker' Jessett hits haunting new peaks as his world-weary tales of separation, loss and heartbreak are cushioned by delicate vocal interplay with Anne Gilpin, echoing the textured dynamic of John Langford and Sally Timms in Mekons' mid-'80s prime. Whether rolling into town over the clipped vibrato guitars of Chinatown, drily bemoaning the shock of prison in First Night ("They've got the wrong kind of bars in here") or rubbing salt into old wounds on Old Love Letters, these bruised, atmosphere heavy spirituals are both deceptively wrought and deeply stirring.

Andy Cowan

Allison Moorer: a wolf at her door.

AMERICANA

BY SYLVIE SIMMONS



James McMurtry

★★★★

Complicated Game

INGROOVES/FONTANA. CD/DL/LP

Finally, a follow-up to 2008's *Just Us Kids*.

SEVEN YEARS ago, Texan singer-songwriter James McMurtry released a record that was nominated for best Americana artist and album of the year. Deservedly so, it was a gem of lean, mordant, story-telling songs about Americans on the losing end. There are more such songs here. "Honey, don't be yellin' at me while I'm cleaning my gun," sings the character in opening track Copper Canteen, accompanied by troubadour guitar, banjo and melody as sparse as it ought to be. There's a sense in almost all the songs of open roads either beckoning or closing in, or both, and a sense in McMurtry's voice that he knows that feeling well; much of the time between albums was spent on the road before he recorded this with C.C. Adcock in New Orleans. Highlights include the coffeehouse folk of You Got To Me and She Loves Me and the mid-tempo groove of Forgotten Coast.

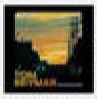
ALSO RELEASED

Tom Heyman

★★★★

That Cool Blue Feeling

BOHEMIAN NEGLECT. CD/DL/LP



Lots of great songs, too, on San Francisco-based Tom Heyman's first album in 10 years. Stories about people on the losing end, but in late-night, street-lamped urban settings instead of McMurtry's open roads. Time And Money, Keep The River On Your Right, and Always Be Around are instantly addictive, and you could imagine Johnny Cash covering Number 9.

Johnny Dowd

★★★★

That's Your Wife On The Back Of My Horse

MOTHER JINX. CD/DL

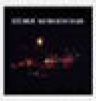
Johnny Dowd's latest is self-released and solo, bar the female backing vocals. There's distorted guitar riffs, drum machines, weird keyboards and the dark humour and twisted wisdom he's known for. White Dolemite is disco, on Words Are Birds he's a serial killer in a Captain Beefheart mask and the title track (great title) is beat poetry over electronic metal. Best of all: the 'wrong side' blues of The Devil Don't Bother Me.

Jesse Malin

★★★

New York Before The War

ONE LITTLE INDIAN. CD/DL/LP



Jesse Malin's first album since 2010 starts and ends with a piano ballad. But mostly it rocks – sometimes with a bit of Springsteen big-rock glory (Turn Up The Mains), sometimes with a touch of Ryan Adams (The Year That I Was Born). There's something addictively power-pop about Oh Sheena and, erm, Addicted, but in a good way.

Jorma Kaukonen

★★★★

Ain't No Hurry

RED HOUSE. CD/LP/DL

A brilliant guitar player – country-blues sparkles and slides insouciantly off his fingers (Nobody Loves You When You're Down And Out) – it sounds here as if Jorma Kaukonen is sitting on a porch, kicking back with sun shining through the dust. It's now 50 years since he co-founded Jefferson Airplane but many songs go back further still: The Carter Family; Woody Guthrie; the Great Depression (Brother Can You Spare A Dime). *SS*

FILTER ALBUMS EXTRA

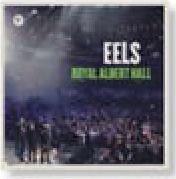
James Bay

★★★

Chaos And The Calm

VIRGIN/EMI. CD/DL/LP

North Herts sensation's debut strives for a Bruce via Nashville 'big music' feel, peppered by rather hollow AOR ballads – "you being you", "me being me", us being on fire, etc. Polished and platitude-laden but hugely effective. *JB*



Eels

★★★

Royal Albert Hall

E WORKS. CD+DVD

Two CDs plus a DVD of Mark Everett's quietly thrilling pop *noir* live in 2014, includes gothic encore on the venue's famed pipe organ and a lovely, Waitsian cover of Can't Help Falling In Love. The DVD is all you really need though. *JB*

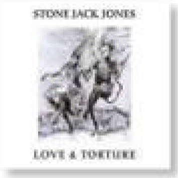
José James

★★★

Yesterday I Had The Blues

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL

It's 100 years since the birth of Billie Holiday. After Rebecca Ferguson and Cassandra Wilson tributes, JJ views Lady Day from a male angle in nine songs. OK, but her original work is still easy to find and buy. *GB*



Stone Jack Jones

★★★

Love & Torture

WESTERN VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Lambchop's Kurt Wagner adds his ocean deep baritone to Jones's sourmash tones on highlight Circumstance, while Patty Griffin brings a pure, icy chill with BVs on two tracks. Overall, this is unsettling, bone-rattling Americana. *JB*

Nikki Lane

★★★

All Or Nothing

NEW WEST. CD/DL

Dan Auerbach and South Carolina-born Lane met at a flea market and The Black Keys man ended up producing this slow-burning second set. The well-crafted country-inspired songs are typified by the pair's duet on Love's On Fire. *PA*

Jo Lawry

★★★★

Taking Pictures

FLEURIEU MUSIC. CD/DL

Aussie jazz vocalist/singer-songwriter whose day job with Sting saw her spotlighted in 20 Feet From Stardom. Here he is again, duetting on dignified break-up song Impossible. More drama on Ready Aim Fire, on this restrained, elegant set. *CP*

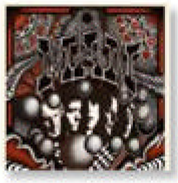
Ralegh Long

★★★★

Hoverance

GARE DU NORD. CD/DL

Lovely, quietly reflective songs sung in hushed, lisping tones common to the more recondite male singer-songwriter. Sad, spooky pastoralism of Bill Fay or Nick Drake are touchstones on songs laden with rural imagery and dexterous melody. *JB*



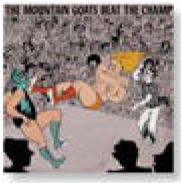
Man

★★★

Reanimated Memories

ESOTERIC. CD

Only Martin Ace and Phil Ryan of the originals remain as links to Welsh psychsters' '70s peak. Ryan's three tracks best capture Man's spirit; Ace's lyrics look back, often touchingly; his son, Josh, adds fresh perspectives. Vocals no longer the best. *GB*



The Mountain Goats

★★★★

Beat The Champ

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

Mark Kozelek has the songs-about-boxing market, lead Goat/lauded novelist John Darnielle does it for wrestling: witty, tender pieces to charm even those for whom wrestling means Shirley Crabtree. *JB*

Nubiyan Twist

★★★

Nubiyan Twist

WORMFOOD. CD/DL

Leeds-formed 12-piece now based in the South boast fine horn arranging/playing, jazz-Afro flecked grooves (Straight Lines), reggae (Hypnotised), a jazz-funk Figure Numatic and Shake Me Down's tight Afro-jazz-funk. Interesting future. *GB*

Thunder

★★★★

Wonder Days

EARMUSIC. CD/2-CD/DL/2-LP

Purveyors of superior British hard rock, Thunder return with their first album in six years. If the title (and sleeve) harks back to their '70s youth, the music sounds fresh and inspired on what is an invigorating set. *PA*

Venom

★★★

From The Very Depths

SPINEFARM. CD/DL

Godfathers of black metal, Venom return with their 14th studio album. A polished affair, it cannot but fail to eschew their naïve early '80s glory, but the track Long Haired Punks continues to sum up their perennial hooligan outlook. *PA*

The Wanton Bishops

★★★★

Sleep With The Lights On

SUBURBAN. CD/DL

Formed in Beirut, in thrall to Mississipi, garage-blues duo's 2012 debut gets UK release. A generous, howlin' set, pop hooks lurking beneath the surface. *PA*

Pete Williams

★★★★

Roughnecks + Roustabouts

BASEHART RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Kevin Rowland isn't the only Midnight Runner with a story to tell. Dexys' bassist croons a second set of pleasingly grizzled yet groovy teenage vignettes that whisk him from factory floor to stage door. *PS*

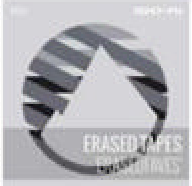
NOWSTREAMING

Ratking

700 Fill

Andrew Kass

New bit-torrent-only mixtape from Harlem rappers Ratking and its opener finds MC Wiki praising the quality of his pillows – "Down feathers all the way," he snarls, "700 fill." Bedding aside, American Gods is rote boasting and not on a par with last year's debut album, *So It Goes*, but the trio soon happen upon remarkable magic: the sparse, slow, psychedelic Arnold Palmer, a tribute to the art of blending iced tea and lemonade; the disorientating, loop-twisting, tempo-sliding Bethel; the drowsy, sun-kissed lilt of Eternal Reveal; the menacing, skeletal electro crawl of Steep Tech. Let's hope their second album-proper errs on the side of these trippy, majestic tracks. *SC* (BitTorrent)



Various

Erased Faves

A 50-minute mix by the Erased Tapes label includes the ambient textures of A Winged Victory For The Sullen and Nils Frahm's diaphanous piano. (Erased Tapes Mixcloud)

Frank Black

How You Went So Far

Loose, rumbling demo of this track from *Black Letter Days*, just one of 100-odd on Frank Black And The Catholics' incoming box. (Cooking Vinyl SoundCloud)

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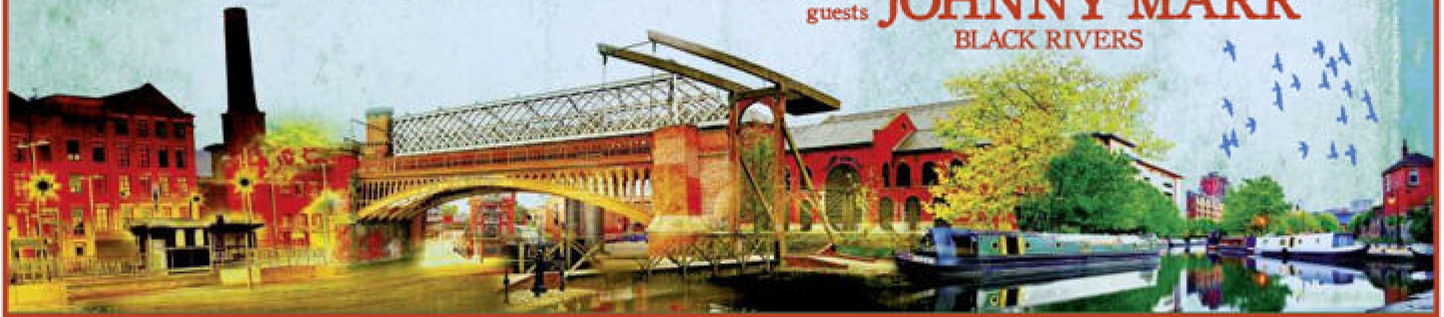

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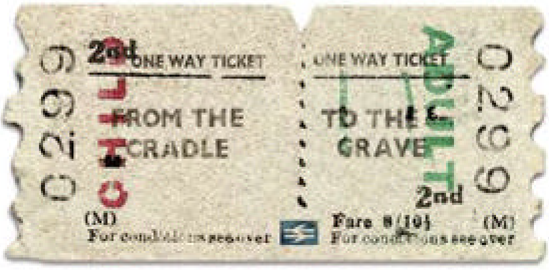

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Here's the exclusive monthly guide to the country's most mouthwatering independent record emporia. Chosen for their knowledge of both current releases and specialist areas, they're guaranteed to provide the personal touch you won't find elsewhere. And they stock MOJO too. All where you see this sign.

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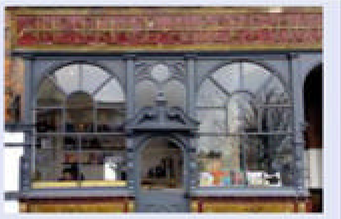

Hot Salvation is the realisation of George Clift and Natalie Barker combining their love of vinyl, new and old with their deep connections to DIY music, putting on shows and releasing records under the HS banner, as well as providing a first class service to the area, curating the finest selection of Punk, Alternative, Jazz, World Music, Soundtracks. Reggae, Metal, Experimental, Electronic music and more, sourcing their stock from all UK indie distributors, DIY and independent record labels and direct from artists all over the world, as well as tirelessly sourcing interesting used stock.
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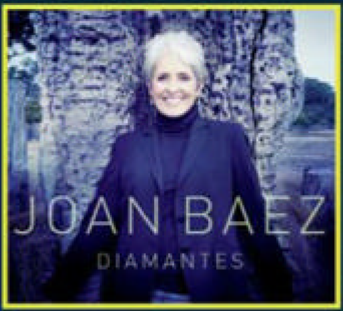

Originally created for last year's tour of South America, 'Diamantes' combines Spanish language songs taken from 1988's 'Diamonds And Rust In The Bullring', two newly recorded Portuguese songs and previously unreleased concert recordings including 'It's All Over Now Baby Blue', 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot', 'Suzanne', 'Imagine', 'Farewell Angelina' and 'The Boxer'.
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Urban planning

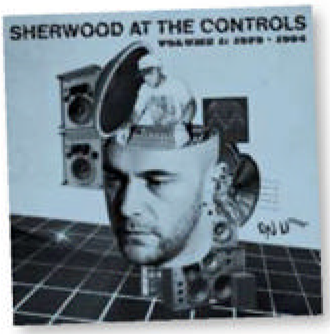
The dubmaster's early production visions for The Slits, The Fall, Mark Stewart and more, ripe for reinvestigation. By **Ian Harrison**.

Various

★★★★

Sherwood At The Controls Volume 1: 1979-1984

ON-U SOUND. CD/ DL/ LP



"I hear sound in a three-dimensional way," says Adrian Sherwood, matter-of-factly, down the line from his Ramsgate home. "When I mix I just see it – the huge snare above your head, the hi-hat underneath it, the sound moving about left and right." (*Pause*) "Don't make me sound like an arty wanker."

It's an unsentimental stance that's served him well in the 35 years since he began exploring the studio as creative instrument. Born in London but soon relocated to Slough and then High Wycombe, the young Sherwood was initiated into the mysteries of bass when standing outside the latter town's Twilight Club at the turn of the '70s, "laughing" at how the West Indian sound systems rattled the windows and doorframes with elephantine speaker power. On closer investigation he got attuned to reggae's rhythmic power, spaced out productions and moral message – all combining into what he calls "the fire".

A stint distributing reggae vinyl followed in his later teens and by 1978 he'd formed the Hitrun label with collaborator Peter 'Dr Pablo' Stroud and made the leap to producer with Creation Rebel's debut *Dub From Creation*. In January 1980, New Age Steppers' Fade Away 45 would inaugurate his On-U Sound label. Through the '80s and beyond, this collective-minded DIY vehicle crewed by reggae musicians, punks and other mavericks would release bass-informed, exploratory LPs by African Head Charge, Dub Syndicate and others: active long before the post-acid house explosion of drum'n'bass, trip hop and other electronic cross-pollinations, its forward-thinking output is an essential part of UK urban music history.

But as this set demonstrates, this self-motivated producer's work went beyond reggae and its offshoots. A snapshot of the diverse post-punk, independent milieu that collects productions and remix work for labels including Y and Rough Trade as well as On-U, it touches on punk funk, some major label chart contenders and a North African electro-pop record made in France, plus other reggae-based tracks more easily assimilated into the On-U worldview. What unites them all is a vivid sonic signature, the urge to deconstruct, and the blending of esoteric mind states and unignorable physicality.

Perversely, it begins with Hungry, So Angry, a 1981 45 by Nottingham post-punks Medium Medium. A nervy, slap-bass chugging howl that reached Number 48 on Billboard's Disco Chart, there's a minimum of studio effects employed, but its high-tensile appeal is undimmed. It's one of several tracks whose levels of disruption are in the songs rather than the production: a rare 7-inch of The Slits' Man Next Door is squishy, distant dub rock with struck jam jars and a vocal lift from the theme to The Good, The Bad And The Ugly, but there is no gratuitous reverb action. Similarly, The Fall's Middle Mass – a sardonic challenge invoking tape loops, cider and the Wehrmacht – is distinguished by its effects-free sound (see Back Story).

Things start to levitate, though, with Let It Take You There, from 1982's sole LP from Pop Group/Glaxo Babies successor group Maxmium Joy. A warming, percussive funk-out with holographic sound manipulation (as with later songs from African Head Charge and Gardening By Moonlight, you can almost see Sherwood's hands on the mixing desk), it's like some particularly free, late-night outtake from The Clash's *Sandinista!* Less genial, Vivien Goldman's Private Armies Dub also shows reality-warping levels of spatial disorientation, with toy xylophones, bossa nova beatboxes and a violin glimpsed through a heavy fug of mixing desk sorcery. This authentic, distorted On-U flavour is also represented by Mark Stewart + The Maffia's lacerating Learning To Cope With Cowardice – here in a rare version from a 1983 Dutch flexidisc. Avant-hip hop with jagged bass notes and nyabinghi rhythms seemingly played on a home keyboard, Stewart's grisly broadcasting of his cranial interior is still unnerving and authoritative.

This sense of dread – homoeopathically cured by the heaviness of the tunes – is acute in the unreleased Prince Far I track Nuclear Weapon. A serious dub with massive snare drums standing in for intercontinental detonations, the sampled intoning of the title by volcano-voiced Far I has poignancy, in that the singer was senselessly murdered in Kingston in 1983. There's more rising terror in Third Gear Kills by Annie Anxiety, the New York-born voice who lived in Sherwood's garden shed while recording 1984's *Soul Possession* LP. Introduced, with gruesome incongruity, by a muffled sample of Perry Como's migraine-inducing Magic Moments, the song finds her table-tapping a gasping, macabre tale of death in a car over a sound collage of spectral foreboding.

Perhaps the most startling dismantling is the Heart Of Darkness-referencing Mistah Linn He Dead by tenebrous art-dance outsiders Shriekback. A drastic reimagining of the band's Hand On My Heart, a Number 52 hit in June '84, this metallo-dub version strips the song's constituent parts away leaving just the beats played on the Linn drum machine and sheets of serrated noise: in the best dub tradition, the song's hook makes but a fleeting appearance, miles over the horizon, through a cloud of coloured smoke.

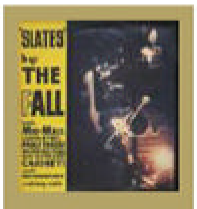
Today, Sherwood calls this period, "more the 'winging it' years than the learning years. I didn't know what I was doing… but being amongst good musicians and good producers made me look good, and you pick up tips, and tactics. I was in pursuit of my own sound, using certain effects and techniques. I was very conscious of that early on. If people buy this and we go on in five-year cycles, we've got another six or seven volumes to follow this. But this record is me finding my feet a bit."

Three decades on, it more than stands up. Time to place the speakers far apart, and watch those sounds move.

KEY TRACKS

- Let It Take You There by Maximum Joy
- Nuclear Weapon by Prince Far I
- Learning To Cope With Cowardice by Mark Stewart + The Maffia
- Mistah Linn He Dead by Shriekback

> **"WHEN I MIX I JUST SEE IT – THE HUGE SNARE ABOVE YOUR HEAD, THE HI-HAT UNDERNEATH, THE SOUND MOVING LEFT AND RIGHT."**
> Adrian Sherwood



Kishi Yamamoto

BACK STORY: ANTI-PRODUCTION

When Adrian Sherwood helped produce Middle Mass on The Fall's 1981 EP Slates, he mike'd up the studio hallway hoping to complete recording via the toilets. But when the band returned from the pub, Fall dictator Mark E Smith rejected all such techniques. "We just balanced the tune up, Mark played kazoo really loud and out of tune, that was it. I did very, very little, but it was quite significant, I learned anti-production techniques from Mark and Grant Showbiz, which I have applied to my own work, by not having any effects at all, and then having loads, and really getting it *dry*."

Up the garden path: Annie Anxiety, outside her home in Adrian Sherwood's shed. The producer is babysitting.

Various

★★★★

Studio One Jump-Up: Jamaican R&B, Jazz, & Early Ska

SOUL JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Groundbreaking records that gave birth to the Jamaican music industry.

Often described as Jamaica's Motown since so many local stars started off there, Clement Dodd's Studio One was pivotal in the development of Jamaican popular music. This excellent compilation goes back to the very beginnings of the JA music industry, compiling some of the earliest non-mento recordings ever committed to tape on the island, and actually prefaces the establishment of Studio One, dating from a time when Dodd was recording at Federal with the set of core musicians that would later form The Skatalites. The influence of American R&B looms large, as heard on Aubrey Adams And Rico Rodriguez's Stew Peas And Cornflakes and Derrick Morgan's Wigger Wee Shuffle, but there are diverse styles at play here, with gospel underpinning The Maytals' He Will Provide and a touch of rock on The Jivin' Juniors' Hip Rub. The booklet gives good context, too.

David Katz

Anthony Braxton

★★★

Trio And Duet

SACKVILLE. CD/DL

When the avant-gardist found his groove.

Now 69, Chicago-born multi-reeds player Braxton is still making music today. A noted proponent of avant-garde music with over 100 recordings to his name, this prolific ex-music professor has always eluded classification due to his ability to balance radical and progressive notions with a profound admiration for the jazz tradition. This dichotomy is at the heart of Braxton's *oeuvre* and is perfectly encapsulated by this expanded reissue of 1974's *Trio And Duet*. It opens with an eerie free-form piece for a trio that includes a Moog, but the rest of the album is more orthodox and finds Braxton working with British bassist Dave Holland on five duets that explore jazz standards such as The Song Is You and You Go To My Head. The results swing vigorously with a truly infectious finger-clicking gait.

Charles Waring

Elia Y Elizabeth

★★★★

La One Da

VAMPISOUL. CD/DL/LP

The slightly psychedelic sounds of young Colombia in the 1970s.

Though Elia Y Elizabeth only recorded for a couple of years (a single in 1971, a second and final album in 1973), these Spanish-Colombian sisters' timing was immaculate. With Tropicália having blossomed in Brazil and many authoritarian governments bewildered by cultural movements in Latin America, their discography overflows with an organic, innocent funkiness and folkiness that nodded to youthful passions without upsetting conservatives. Debut single Fue Una Lágrima sets the scene: lithe bassline, electric harpsichord, two voices that harmonise well without ever becoming close. With Farfisa and fuzz-guitar gilding their singing, their best songs – Libre, Alegría, Mis 32 Dientes – find them sitting comfortably between the softer side of Os Mutantes and Sérgio Mendes's A&M output. Stung by the way the industry treated them, early retirement loomed – but for two summers, nobody put more sunshine into their pop music.

David Hutcheon

Bettye LaVette

★★★★

Child Of The Seventies

REAL GONE. CD/DL

Straight-talking soul singer after she had a hit – but before she was famous.

Betty LaVette was just 16 when My Man – He's A Lovin' Man became a Top 10 US R&B single for Atlantic Records in 1962. Despite that early success, LaVette's career floundered for several decades until 2005 when her album, *I've Got My Own Hell To Raise*, sparked a musical renaissance that continues to this day. Her career trajectory might have been markedly different, though, if Atco had not inexplicably shelved the stunning *Child Of The Seventies* LP in 1972. Helmed by Millie Jackson's producer Brad Shapiro, it consists of 12 raw, cathartically soulful tracks with the stand-out being Your Turn To Cry and a rambunctious cover of Free's The Stealer. Duplicating Rhino Handmade's long-out-of-print 2005 reissue, this package appends the original album with 10 bonus cuts, including the aforementioned big US hit that launched the singer's career 53 years ago.

Charles Waring

Eddie Harris

★★★

E.H. In The U.K.: The London Sessions

WARNER. CD

How the US saxophonist's time in the UK capital was commemorated.

The supporting cast on US saxophonist Eddie Harris's solitary UK recording session, from 1974, is jaw-dropping – the redoubtable Jeff Beck and Steve Winwood are present plus Chris Squire and Alan White from Yes, Zoot Money, Albert Lee and Deep Purple's Ian Paice. Despite their stellar presence, though, the album – helmed by Velvet Underground producer Geoffrey Haslam – doesn't quite gel. It's certainly a lot looser and laidback than Harris's American Atlantic sessions and fails to achieve the creative heights that many would expect from its much-feted personnel. Nevertheless, the versatile Harris, who wrote all of the tunes and alternates between electric sax, trumpet (played with a reed) and piano, is in good form. Long out-of-print, this forgotten curio is no classic but is certainly worth tracking down.

Charles Waring

Jackie Wilson

★★★★

NYC 1961-1966

ACE. CD/DL

The holy grail: 48 rarities from the Brunswick vaults.

This double CD gathers rare singles and previously unissued cuts from 1961 to '66, a crucial period in the Detroit singer's development from rock'n'roller to soul man. 1963's The New Breed and 1965's I Believe I'll Love On are the pick of the 45s. The first, penned by teen idol Paul Evans but in Jackie's hands rooted in jazz, is ripe for rediscovery as a Mod club anthem; the second, produced by Nat Tarnopol and Eddie Singleton, is spirited call and response *à la* Ray Charles and his Raelettes. The previously unreleased cuts are cracking too, spanning future floor-fillers (the glorious Me, My Mother's Son from 1965) to pleading blues (1965's Linda Hopkins cover I Can't Stand Another Hurt (In My Heart)). Hopkins, meanwhile, appears in person on 1963's Say I Do, a fiery collaboration which shakes the foundations.

Lois Wilson

Looper

★★★

These Things

MUTE. CD/DL

High-minded Glasgow folk-hoppers celebrate overdue return by totally repurposing back catalogue.

After juggling the twin careers of musician and writer, Stuart David waved goodbye to Belle & Sebastian to form Looper. Part band, part art performance, their breezy lo-fi electronica merged his twin passions adroitly, not least on their trademark spoken word narratives. *These Things* is nothing but ambitious; a 5-CD dive into Looper's back catalogue that archly re-orders its contents by type – a process that both plays to their strengths and underscores their weaknesses. The evocative, slowly unwinding tales of Offgrid: Offline and Images Of The Shipwreck (collected as *Lexiphonics*) effortlessly captivate, while the hot buttered Bontempi Hall & Oates of New York Snow (*Melos*), or the twinkling toy-town electro of Ballad Of Ray Suzuki (*Kinokraft*) begin to pall when corralled together in such broad, sonically conformist chunks.

Andy Cowan

Ska face: Clement Dodd (left), gets a level on Don Drummond's trombone.

“An old-time, old-school human jukebox”: Huddie Ledbetter, aka Leadbelly.

Courtesy of the Leadbelly Estate

Breaking rock

The last word on the convicted killer and extraordinary musician who shaped the future of white music. By Lois Wilson.

Leadbelly
★★★★★
Leadbelly: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection
SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS/DISCOVERY. CD

ON JULY 16, 1933, musicologist John Lomax visited Angola prison on behalf of the Library of Congress in Louisiana to record its inmates singing prison songs. There, he met the 45-year-old Huddie Ledbetter, who, going under the nickname of Leadbelly, was serving time for attempted homicide. Impressed by his expressive voice, Lomax taped him singing the ballad Irene (Goodnight Irene), the first of 12 songs he’d put down that day. The importance of that occasion would only reveal itself later: it was the moment that music’s destiny was foretold – when folk and blues entered the established cultural (white) vernacular.

Leadbelly had been singing since his earliest days – in the fields, churches, schools, sukey jumps and prison – and he’d already spent time on the chain gang in 1915, then in 1917 in Texas’s Sugarland prison for murder. Yet he only recorded for a paltry 15 years up to his death in 1949. He passed away just six months before The Weavers, the American folk group featuring his friend Pete Seeger, took their version of Irene to Number 1 where it remained for 13 weeks.

Leadbelly did, though, leave behind a leviathan archive, one that paints a picture of what compiler Robert Santelli calls “an old-time, old-school human jukebox”, a songster who could sing pretty much any kind of song he put his voice to and make it sound good. It’s this Leadbelly that Santelli and his co-compiler Jeff Place present here.

With 108 songs – 16 of which are previously unreleased – spread over five CDs, and housed in a 140-page large-format hardback book containing rare photos and extensive biographical notes, *Leadbelly: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection* is a work of art in itself.

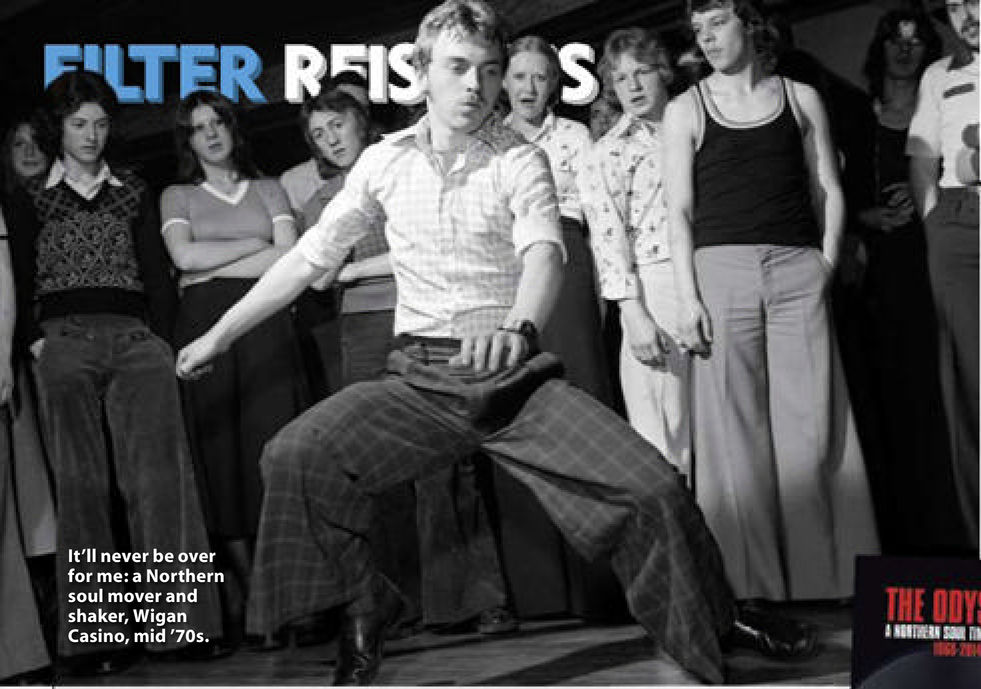
Collated from his Library Of Congress recordings, Moses ‘Moe’ Asch’s folk labels, shows for New York’s WNYC radio series Folk Songs Of America and tracks from his 1948 *Last Sessions*, it’s also the first set to cherry-pick from his entire career.

Disc 1 serves as an introduction to his most famous works and hits like a sucker punch, opening with a reading of Irene (Goodnight Irene), recorded circa 1943. Leadbelly’s voice, world weary from hard living, and backed by mournful 12-string guitar-picking and moanin’ blues harp provided by Sonny Terry, is spine-tingling: time has not lessened its haunting power. Neither has it diminished the impact of his classic treatments of Rock Island Line, The Midnight Special, The Bourgeois Blues and Black Girl (Where Did You Sleep Last Night). It really is all stop-you-in-your-tracks music here.

Discs 2 and 3 continue apace: a snapshot takes in topical songs (the bellowing Queen Mary), protest (a caustic Jim Crow Blues), party tunes (an accordion-driven Laura), spirituals (the previously unissued I’m So Glad I Done Got Over) and tracks from a 1946 session with fan-turned-influence Woody Guthrie (a rousing Alabama Bound, a rockin’ Fiddler’s Dram).

Discs 4 and 5, meanwhile, are given over to his 1941 radio show appearances and his last sessions, recorded in 1948. The first captures him in a gospel setting with the Oleander Quartet on a spirited I Went Up On The Mountain, Looked Down At The Rising Sun and with Anne Graham on the passionate Rock Me (Hide Me In Thy Bosom). The second, recorded in friend and producer Fred Ramsey’s New York apartment, are intimate and laid back, with Leadbelly singing a cappella on field holler Ain’t Going Down To The Well No More and prison song Go Down Old Hannah, and impromptu ‘duetting’ with Bessie Smith on Nobody Knows You When You’re Down And Out (he’s actually singing along to Bessie’s 78 and it’s the softest his voice has ever sounded.)

From prison cell to friend’s front room, this beautifully put together set is truly inspiring and probably the closest we will ever get to understanding the man who soundtracked the African American experience and was at the root of rock’n’roll.



It'll never be over for me: a Northern soul mover and shaker, Wigan Casino, mid '70s.

The big society

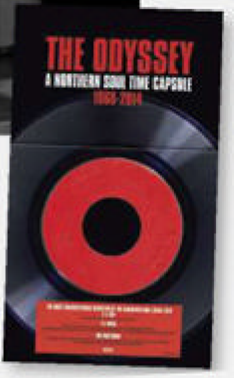
The sounds, sights and fights of a journey in dance. By **Geoff Brown**.

Various

★★★★★

The Odyssey: A Northern Soul Time Capsule

HARMLESS. CD/DL



THE NORTHERN soul dance scene that first spun into the wider national consciousness in 1974-75 but had begun in the late '60s is again enjoying one of its intermittent booms in fashionability – the feature films Soul Boy (2010) and last year's superior Northern Soul. There have already been innumerable Northern soul compilations with much duplication, but this 8-CD box with 230 tracks, charting the scene from its beginnings at Manchester's Twisted Wheel, is the most comprehensive. Two DVDs and an excellent 160-page booklet detailing the history, the rivalries between DJs, the accusations and counterclaims of journalists, the scurrilous white-label bootlegging of singles all add vivid colour and heat under the collar.

CD1 starts with Darrell Banks's evergreen Open The Door To Your Heart, features big names like The Impressions and Gladys Knight, and tracks such as 60 Minutes Of Your Love (Homer Banks) and Barefootin' (Robert Parker) which had been UK soul band repertoire favourites in the '60s. At first, Northern soul drew on a Motown-rooted template typified by a driving 4/4 snare beat, vibes, handclaps, tambourine, baritone sax, strong vocals, and would give second leases of life to the careers of venerable soul singers, like Major Lance and pop artists such as Mr Twist aka Chubby Checker.

The venues – the Golden Torch in Stoke-on-Trent, Blackpool Mecca and Wigan Casino; later dancefloors in Cleethorpes and Stafford; then London's 100 Club and off to the Weekenders – the DJs and the music were all the servants of dancing feet. Some DJs tried to maintain a kind of 'soul' quality control, others played anything to keep the dancefloor full (viz the start of CD4). Fed by a hunger for rare and overlooked '60s soul sounds, rarity later seemed to take precedence. Many 'rare' sides were rare for an obvious reason – bland voices, derivative arrangement, weedy production. There were better ways to find new sounds, and you'll hear some DJs broadening the palette by including Philly-influenced dancers or getting funky (Prince George's 1970 side Wrong Crowd) or sourcing better, blue-eyed performances (The James Walsh Gypsy Band's Cuz It's You Girl). So after every nadir – Bobby Paris or Beverly Ann, say – zeniths like Frank Wilson's Do I Love You (Indeed I Do) and The Contours' Baby Hit And Run roar back.

Later, Southern souls like Spencer Wiggins and Carla Thomas, the swinging blues of Lowell Fulson and Z.Z. Hill, a pre-Maze Frankie Beverly and post-R&B queen LaVern Baker all contribute mightily, plus unreleased gems such as Chuck Jackson's What's With This Loneliness. I gigged at the Torch as a drummer in the '60s, and as a writer visited the Casino and Blackpool in the '70s; while the music never sounds *quite* as thrilling as it did on vinyl in a musty hall or sweaty club over speaker cones pushed to the limit, *The Odyssey* ends with Timi Yuro's It'll Never Be Over For Me, and for Northern soul devotees, that will stand.

Daniel Avery

★★★★

New Energy (Collected Remixes)

PHANTASY. CD/DL

Dancefloor mavens flock to take on techno titan.

Like fellow organic techno protagonist Jon Hopkins, Daniel Avery leant towards the symphonic rather than the wantonly lip-chewing on 2013 debut *Drone Logic*. It says much about the impact that record made that this package of remixes attracts big hitters from the serious end of the dancefloor continuum. The doyen of the UK industrial techno scene, Ali 'Perc' Wells, is among a number of high-profile contributors, plus Paul Woolford, Matthew Dear, Ø [Phase], Kink and Roman Flügel. The thump and yowl that characterise Wells's abrasive take on Reception means he is likely to remain an acquired taste for the more demure consumer, but you can't say the same for Flügel. The German makes a habit of turning in quirky, slow-burning house epics. His reworking of All I Need is no different, using stealth to creep up on you, then discharging into a magnificent mess of manic synth brass.

Stephen Worthy

The Specials

★★★★

More Specials

2 TONE/WARNERS CATALOGUE. CD/DL

Genre-busting second album gets a deluxe edition.

Even after six years of inspirational heritage-rockin' tours (albeit minus guiding light Jerry Dammers – see MOJO Interview p38), The Specials' canon has been sketchily represented after the fact. *More Specials* only made it onto CD with 2002's first round of remasters. This second lot finally bumps it up to a 2-CD trawl: with a bunch of non-album singles (including Ghost Town), B-sides and sessions to draw from, it's definitely the pick of the three albums in deluxe-ed – although, the omission of Roddy Radiation's rockabilly rave-up Braggin' And Tryin' Not To Lie from the original LP's bonus 7-inch, and any unreleased outtakes, seems churlish. *More Specials* itself, though, is still a brain-buster: with the group rebelling against Dammers to be involved in songwriting, and the man himself bingeing on exotica, Afro jazz and other contentious delicacies, it's the thrilling sound of limitless possibility at the point of collective implosion. Fabulous in CD clarity, too, oddly.

Andrew Perry

Judas Priest

★★★

Defenders Of The Faith

COLUMBIA/LEGACY. CD+DL

Special 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition, a year late.

Originally released in 1984, Judas Priest's ninth studio album was aptly named. At a time when hair and thrash metal were both on the rise, this veteran British band remained a bastion of old-school leather-and-studs heavy metal. Defenders of the faith, indeed. The album was essentially a companion piece to 1982's *Screaming For Vengeance*, only more over-the-top. On its cover was The Metallian: part tank, part wildcat, with added horns. A similarly cartoonish sensibility informed key tracks such as the manic biker anthem Freewheel Burning and superhero slice-'em-up The Sentinel. And while the violent sexual fantasy Eat Me Alive led to protests from American pro-censorship campaigner Tipper Gore, wife of Al, the album sold a million in the US. Completing this Deluxe Edition is a 2-CD live recording from California on the Defenders tour. No head remained unbanged.

Paul Elliott

Daniele Ciullini

★★★

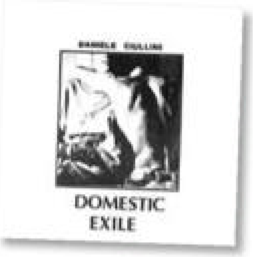
Domestic Exile: Collected Works 82-86

ECSTATIC RECORDINGS. LP

Sixteen slices of Italian existential post-punk synth minimalism.

Ciullini's soundworld is difficult to date, but indicators include the brevity of the pieces, the tinny drum machine patterns and some of the lo-fi synth sounds. Its mixture of melody and edginess comes across like some strange hybrid of Cabaret Voltaire and Cluster, with occasional use of heavy echo that reminds of music from Radiophonic Workshop in the '60s. Musician and photographer Ciullini described these quickly composed miniatures – originally released on cassette – as "sonic polaroids" of his interior state. It's an odd mix, from the blurred but resonant soundings of Deep Water to the agitated and sibilant drum machine of Silence, while Silence 3 is full of percolating rhythms and chaotic crashings. *Domestic Exile* will be mainly of interest to archaeologically minded electronica buffs, but what initially felt a tad insubstantial keeps finding its way back into the deck.

Mike Barnes



Mirrorpix

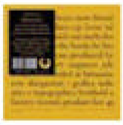
Section 25

★★★★

Always Now

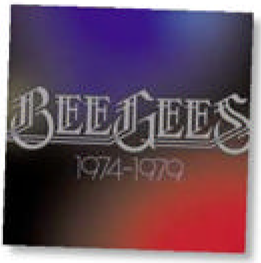
FACTORY BENELUX. CD/DL

Overlooked Factory Records artefact stands the test of time with aplomb.



The rhythm-focused first album by Blackpool's Section 25 is a vital mid-point between the bass-driven side of PIL's *Metal Box* and minimalist Joy Division workouts like I Remember Nothing. A 'Kraut-ish' spaciousness brings a trippy disorientation. Back in 1981 though, much distracted from the music. *Always Now*'s Peter Saville-designed sleeve was Factory Records' most lavish to date. A hard-card envelope lined with multi-colour marbling encased the vinyl. It was produced by Martin Hannett at Pink Floyd's Britannia Road Studio, where he and Joy Division had completed *Closer*. Joy Division already loomed: Ian Curtis co-produced Section 25's debut 45, Girls Don't Count, included as an extra here. Heard now without the baggage, *Always Now* shouts that it is not to be overlooked. Its case is enhanced by the copious bonuses on this double set which include an impressively high fidelity 1980 live show.

Kieron Tyler



Bee Gees

★★★★

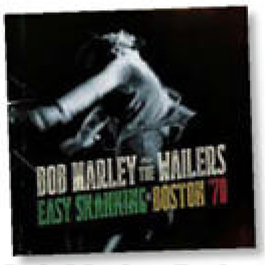
1974-1979

WARNERS. CD/DL

The brothers Gibb's disco gold rush years.

By early 1974, it seemed that the Bee Gees were all but over, infamously getting gigs in the UK only on the cabaret circuit. Within four years, they were the best-selling act in the world. This collection (four studio albums and a new compilation, *The Miami Years*) illustrates how they morphed into Southern US disco gentlemen, marrying their impeccable songwriting with vibrant, dancefloor-friendly R&B. Of the original albums, their 1974 Arif Mardin-produced *Mr Natural* has been seen as a dress rehearsal for what was to happen, and is fascinating for it. Only the in-era use of Fender Rhodes suggests that Throw A Penny was not from the '60s; as it segues into Down The Road, it has a Who-like aggression one wouldn't immediately associate with the group. From thereon, this period of the Bee Gees' career remains an acquired taste, but it's impossible to deny the on-going majesty of Stayin' Alive, How Deep Is Your Love or Jive Talkin'.

Daryl Easlea



Bob Marley And The Wailers

★★★★

Easy Skanking In Boston '78

UME. CD/DL/DVD

Bob Marley's further conquest of America.

One of many packages issued to mark what would have been Bob Marley's 70th, this enjoyable CD/DVD package is culled from two performances given at Boston's Music Hall on June 8, 1978. Backed by the Barrett brothers, Tyrone Downey, Junior Marvin, The I-Three and Seeco, Marley is relaxed during the first set, but never less than fully in control: The Heathen and Easy Skanking both display a quiet majesty. Marley and co are fully on fire for the second set, with War/No More Trouble and Exodus both full-throttle workouts, blasting out the Bard's powerful messages of righteousness. The package's DVD element was shot by an amateur, who only captured six songs, but it nevertheless helps flesh out the picture of a Marley who'd amassed a hugely loyal fanbase Stateside. The release ultimately reminds that he put his all into his performances, no matter what the setting.

David Katz

SONNY TIL THE ORIOLES

Sonny Til And The Orioles

★★★★

Live In Chicago 1951

UPTOWN. CD

And these birds could sing.

Rock and Roll Hall of Famers The Orioles were the link between earlier 20th century black vocal groups like the Ink Spots and later doo wop – and thus rock'n'roll. Equipped with just a guitar and upright bass, the quintet's minimalism shows-off close four-part harmonies, swinging rhythms and cello-mellow balladry, all crystal clear in this only live recording of their early incarnation. Lead singer Til dripped with kiss-and-tell honey and his never-wavering ownership of the wail of a single note was something the little girls understood. On their Number 1 hit It's Too Soon To Know, Til holds the penultimate syllable for 15 gorgeous seconds. "You got this one by yourself," quips another Oriole as the mind boggles at the meaning of "this one". Monster hit Crying In The Chapel in '53 was still ahead of them.

Michael Simmons

Hold on, they're coming: Soul Children, born at Stax.

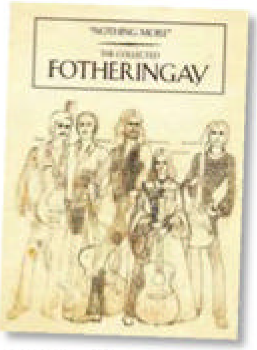
VINYL PACKAGE OF THE MONTH

Various

For The People Pt. 1

GET ON DOWN

What we have here are five sevens from James Brown's People Records imprint, wrapped in facsimile sleeves and housed in a plush hand-numbered carrying case emblazoned with the company logo. The attention to detail is meticulous, in step with Brown's own approach to the funk released on the label, which ran from 1971 to '76. People gave Brown an outlet for his writing/production/arranging skills on output by Bobby Byrd, Hank Ballard, Marva Whitney et al. Come the 1980s, it would also provide the sampling bedrock for hip hop with the tracks here some of the most recycled. On label debut Escapism Pt 1, JB's vocal adlib over hard funk set the agenda. Lyn Collins' blistering 1972 shouter Think (About It), Fred Wesley And The JBs' 1974 rare groove Same Beat and 1975's burn-it-down statement Cross The Track (We Better Go Back) by Maceo And The Macks pushed it forward. *LW*



Fotheringay

★★

Nothing More: The Collected Fotheringay

UNIVERSAL. CD/DL

What Sandy Denny did after Fairport Convention…

Fotheringay lasted a little over a year and only released one album in that time, so this triple CD (plus DVD) spreads the butter very thinly. The collective wisdom in 1970 was that, after exiting Fairport Convention, Sandy Denny was poised for a brilliant solo career. But, plagued by self-doubt and stage fright, she opted for the comfort blanket of Fotheringay with husband Trevor Lucas. It wasn't a success and the band buckled while making their second LP. So we get the two albums (the second was finally completed and released in 2008, 30 years after Sandy's death), complete with demos, remixes, alternative takes, a ropey live concert in Rotterdam and BBC sessions (including a stilted interview with Brian Matthew) plus footage from a German TV show. Sandy's great, but the Lucas country rock element is a weakness, and how many versions of Gypsy Davey and The Sea do we need?

Colin Irwin

Various

The Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles: Volume 2 1968-1971

★★★★★

The Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles: Volume 3 1972-1975

★★★★

UNIVERSAL UMC. CD/DL

The great Memphis label's Indian summer and sad autumn.

First reviewed by this writer in, ahem, MOJO 3 (January/February 1994!), *Volume 2* is excellent – 216 songs on nine CDs in 11-and-a-half hours charting Stax's split with its distributor, Atlantic, which prompted 1969's vinyl-release orgy (27 albums and 30 singles over two weekends to replace a catalogue which was now the property of their former New York partners at Atlantic). Isaac Hayes emerged as a superstar and there were brilliant sides by Mavis Staples, Johnnie Taylor and William Bell, plus the discovery of The Soul Children and The Emotions. But as I mentioned in '94, Jeanne & The Darlings' It's Time To Pay For The Fun (We've Had), about emotional invoicing, actually presaged dire fiscal accounting to come. *Volume 3* has moments of greatness, but is interesting rather than essential.

Geoff Brown

Unprecedented and unexplained: Roxy Music (from left) Phil Manzanera, Bryan Ferry, Andy Mackay (front), Brian Eno, Rik Kenton, Paul Thompson.

FILEUNDER

Charm offensive

From rowdy oddness to poised sophistication in eight compelling steps. By Jim Irvin

Unzipping the deluxe and delightful vinyl box *Roxy Music 1-8* (Island/Universal, ★★★★★), it all comes flooding back.

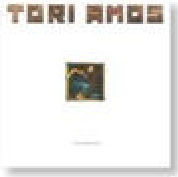
There was no precedent or explanation for debut single Virginia Plain, an alien gumbo of synth, oboe and delinquent guitar, topped with Bryan Ferry's almost Kenneth Williams vocal delivery. 1972's impressionable young brains had to process the audio-visual clues and assess: is this cool or stupid, sexy or repellent? Do I want to be in their gang? Roxy felt distant rather than clubbable and were tough to emulate – especially if you were a tiny 12-year-old. At that age it was hard to see what all the fuss was about regarding the LP sleeve ("There's a lady on it"), but the band photos were riveting, those aloof, space-rocker looks off-camera as compelling as the music's eerie rockabilly echoes from a music hall, everything was teasingly asexual, wryly portentous.

That was the self-titled debut (re-pressed here in its original form, without Virginia Plain), but even better was follow-up *For Your Pleasure* – dizzyingly sassy, practically perfect. For many years after, if anyone asked, I'd say it was my all-time favourite album. Chris Thomas's production is faultless: the jittery thrill of Do The Strand and its cataract of Phil Manzanera guitar, the supercharged Editions Of You, like doo wop from Alpha Centauri, Ferry playing a blinder on electric piano and waspish lyric into a great solo relay – Andy Mackay squonks, Eno hoots and Phil shreds – before Paul Thompson (surely UK rock's finest drummer) employs an industrial-strength fill to take us to the bridge. Plus creepy epic Bogus Man and unsettling boy-meets-doll tale In Every Dream Home A Heartache – you can't imagine what that did to a 13-year-old in the early '70s. "I blew up your body, but you blew my mind"? We didn't know where to look.

Stranded was rather more controlled – no Eno, see – but stuffed with Roxy highlights, Street Life, Mother Of Pearl, A Song For Europe. They achieved a near-perfect blend of wayward-ness and refinement on the superb fourth album *Country Life* (no trouble decoding *that* sleeve), but *Siren* had something tired about it. *Manifesto*, the self-produced return after a three-year gap, is sorely undervalued, though they'd definitely turned a corner onto Glossy Boulevard. The '80s brought *Flesh & Blood* and *Avalon*, luxury spas for the ears, producer Rhett Davies working only with beeswax and angel breath, sonic shocks resigned to history.

Few bands were as witty, exploratory and rewarding as Roxy in their pomp. This claret cloth box is a fitting monument: warm, taut, half-speed mastered music in heavy-duty sleeves with lashings of laminate. Every dream home should have one.

> "FOR MANY YEARS AFTER I'D SAY *FOR YOUR PLEASURE* WAS MY ALL-TIME FAVOURITE ALBUM."



Tori Amos
★★★★
Little Earthquakes
RHINO. CD/DL/LP

Remarkable, idiosyncratic 1992 debut plus umpteen bonus tracks fished from a deep well of non-album B-sides and live tracks that reveal a singular creative force from the outset. 1994s *Under The Pink* also out in deluxe edition. *JB*

Tav Falco & Panther Burns
★★★
Hip Flask: An Introduction To…
FRENZI. CD

The Memphis psychobilly ace and his revolving-door band from 1982 on. As wicked as The Cramps, but with a hometown soul influence. *PG*

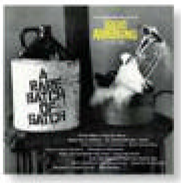
Boz Scaggs
★★★★
Boz Scaggs
EDSEL. CD

Scaggs's latest is reviewed on page 90. Here's his outstanding 1969 debut with a '77 remix. At Muscle Shoals; Duane Allman on slide; R&B, jazz, blues, C&W. The remix adds 33 seconds to an already extraordinary blues-bustin' Loan Me A Dime. *GB*

BLAXPLOITATION

Various
★★★★★
Blaxploitation
SPECTRUM/UNIVERSAL. CD

No-frills box set of six classic soundtracks – *Shaft, Coffy, Shaft In Africa, Black Caesar, Trouble Man, Uptight* – in card slip-cases. Extraordinary value at around £20, and a rare treat hearing Booker T. Jones sing on *Uptight*'s Johnny I Love You. *PG*



Louis Armstrong
★★★
A Rare Batch Of Satch
POLL WINNERS. CD/DL

Expanded 1962 LP collecting Satch's RCA recordings from three decades earlier: orchestra sessions with drummer Chick Webb and Teddy Wilson (piano); timeless and delightful, and on Laughin' Louie some prescient improv blowin'. *PG*

SERGE GAINSBOURG

Serge Gainsbourg
★★★
His First Four Albums
JACKPOT. CD

Even before his hip, funky period Serge Gainsbourg had an innate allure – that rich *flaneur* voice, subtle emotional unease and effortless way with melody – as these two discs of late '50s and '60s chanson, jazz and pop show. *PG*

THE SHADOWS
ORIGINAL ALBUM SERIES

The Shadows
★★★
Original Album Series
WARNERS. CD

The Shads' first five LPs (1961-66) drip with Brylcreemed pre-Fabs virtuosity, soft-shoeing between lulling twang-pop and more rocking touches. Returns diminish towards '66; even now the vocal tracks seem slightly profane. *IH*

Various
★★★★
Vanguard's Lost Psychedelic Era 1966-1970
ACE. CD

New York label-patrolled '60s underground – by the decade's end that meant heavy psych crash'n'burn acts like Listening, Frost, Circus Maximus, etc. *PG*

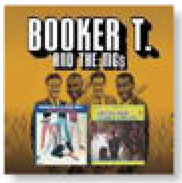
Getty Images

Bonzo Dog Band
★★★★

Original Album Series

WARNERS. CD

All five albums, from *Gorilla* (1967) to *Let's Make Up And Be Friendly* (1972), had gentle lunacy, satire and hits (I'm The Urban Spaceman). Held together by Neil Innes and Roger Ruskin Spear; pulled apart by Viv Stanshall's genius. *GB*

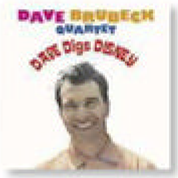


Booker T. & The M.G.'s
★★★★

Hip Hug-Her/Doin' Our Thing

EDSEL. CD

The Stax studio men's ineffably funky instrumentals on '67 and '68 LPs are object lessons in less-is-more taste, with never a wasted note or accented beat. Two other twofers also out. *GB*



Dave Brubeck Quartet
★★★★

Dave Digs Disney

POLL WINNERS. CD

Pianist's quartet trips lightly o'er Walt D's film music – on Alice In Wonderland altoist Paul Desmond lures us to the rabbit hole; Someday My Prince Will Come is a treat, too. Not a Mickey Mouse record. *GB*

John Coltrane
★★★★

Standard Coltrane/ Stardust

POLL WINNERS. CD

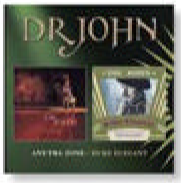
Standard got better reviews at the time ('58), but Stardust (also recorded in '58) has aged better. Trane's work is big and warm on quintet settings of four ballads, Time After Time and the title track are particularly fine. *GB*

Mark Daniels
★★★★

Anthology

MARDEN HILL. DL

The reclusive mind behind last month's Buried Treasure opens the archive for cinematic neo-easy/downtempo/hip hop/ jazz tracks released as Marden Hill, 45Dip and Sugarman. Viv Stanshall guests on sinister dub Bombed On Heavy. *IH*



Dr. John
★★★★

Anuta Zone/Duke Elegant

RHINO. CD/DL

The good Doctor rounds up Paul Weller, Gaz Coombes Jason Pierce and other Brits for a gris-gris romp on *Anuta Zone* then hauls Duke Ellington's music down to New Orleans for a later Blue Note session. *FD*

Deke Leonard
★★★

Iceberg

ESOTERIC. CD

A biting guitarist, Deke was 'let go' by Man in 1973 and cut this punchy solo LP. Hard Way To Live became a Man staple when he rejoined; Razorblade And Rattlesnake and 7171 551 are gritty too. Follow-up *Kamikaze* is also reissued. *GB*

The Legendary Len
★★★

Songs About Love, Dreams & Domestic Appliances

AAZ. CD

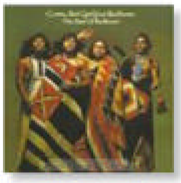
Leeds' Len Liggins sang on *Ukrainski Vistupi V Johna Peela*; his 2004 solo comp is eccentric, enjoyable '80s indie art-rock. *PG*

Frankie Lymon
★★★★

The Teenagers Featuring Frankie Lymon/Rock'n'Roll

HOODOO. CD/DL

Teen rock begins! A two-on-one with The Teenagers' 1956 hit-filled debut album plus Lymon's cover-saturated but less successful first solo set. *FD*

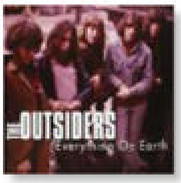


Redbone
★★★★

Come And Get Your Redbone

RETRO WORLD. CD/DL

A most rewarding Redbone best-of filled with infectious '70s sounds including the swamp-pop classic Witch Queen Of New Orleans, the only US chart-topper by a native American band. *FD*

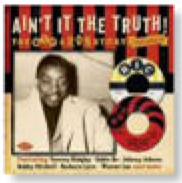


The Outsiders
★★★

Everything On Earth

PSEUDONYM. CD

Three CDs of 1966-71 demos, instrumentals, live tracks and other sweepings from Wally Tax's Amsterdam roughnecks. Includes unheard recordings of less pugnacious successors Tax Free featuring John Cale, plus interviews – in Dutch. *IH*



Various
★★★★

The Ric & Ron Story Volume 2

ACE. CD

Second comp of the New Orleans indie tackles 1960-63, as owner Joe Ruffino focused on the local market: honking, haunting – if mildly 'safe' – R&B from Tommy Ridgely, Johnny Adams and Eddie Bo, et al. *PG*

Various
★★★★

Highlife On The Move

SOUNDWAY. CD/DL/LP

Poignant collection of Nigerian and Ghanaian recordings, 1954-66, describing the fertile osmosis between African jazz and pop musicians in post-Windrush London. Bonus 7-inch features Fela Kuti's first-ever recordings. *PG*

Various
★★★★

The One-Derful Collection

SECRET STASH. CD

First of six comps due in 2015 of six linked Chicago soul labels is exceedingly good, from wild Five Du-Tones soul to Sharpees dancers, via Otis Clay to gentler Beverly Shaffer. Great stuff. *GB*

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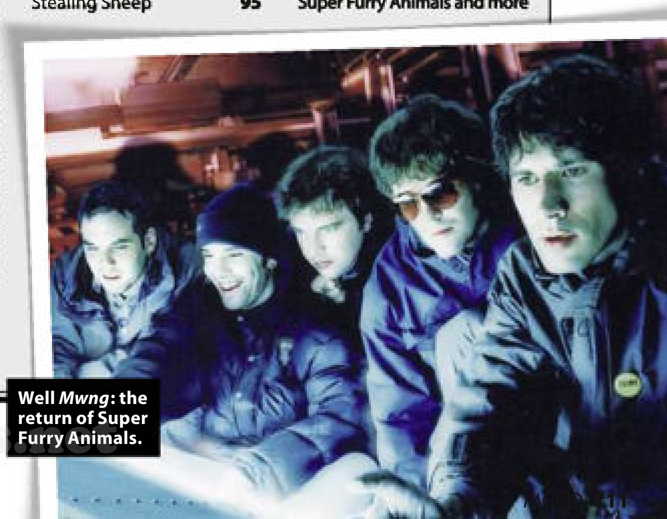


Well *Mwng*: the return of Super Furry Animals.

Newport State Of Mind

This month, found in the provincial oubliette of Britpop indifference, a blistering kamikaze mission of damaged punk magic.

60ft Dolls

The Big 3

INDOLENT, 1996

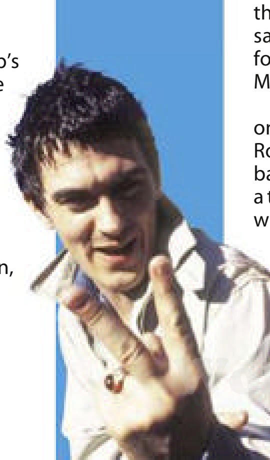
Three is a magic number: having a quick butcher's, 60ft Dolls (from left) Mike Cole, Carl Bevan and Richard J Parfitt; (below) Parfitt greets the public.

"For five minutes in 1996, we were the best rock'n'roll band in the world," contends Richard J Parfitt, one-third of Newport, South Wales power-trio 60ft Dolls. Revisiting their first LP, *The Big 3*, you might easily be swayed to agree. Full of maniacal punk energy, bluesy guitar licks, battered romanticism and underdog anxiety, it sounds like a *cri de coeur* from a bunch of lost souls perched on the edge of an horrific precipice. Which, it transpires, is exactly what it was.

Guitarist and singer Parfitt and bassist Mike Cole had arrived at Britpop's Year Zero of 1993 disillusioned with the music industry. Parfitt had deputised in Jive Records-signed Blood Brothers and local outfit Dub War, while Cole had briefly played with Newport indie stars The Darling Buds. Together with friend Donna Matthews, the pair had taken to boozing in musician-friendly haunts like TJ's and the Riverside Tavern, wallowing in their almost-were status.

"We'd reached this place where we just wanted to have a good time and form a group that rocked out," says Parfitt. "We had no real ambitions any more."

> "WE DIDN'T WASTE THE MONEY WE GOT. WE SPENT IT ON DRUGS AND ALCOHOL."
> **Carl Bevan**



Tom Sheehan (2)

It was while they were drinking in the Riverside Tavern that 18-year-old drummer Carl Bevan offered his services. Bevan was percussionist in his evangelist father's church band until he got sacked for public drunkenness: Parfitt sensed they'd found a kindred soul.

"They were a little bit older than me, naughty as well," recalls Bevan. "From the start, the music was right from the gut. There was a chemistry; we were a three-piece, the triangle, the strongest shape. It felt like it was meant to be."

"The whole band was highly dysfunctional," adds Parfitt. "Mike is the most untogether person you've met in your life. He was born a rock star, a clever and funny guy, but also very sensitive, hyper-aware. Together we were self-destructive and brought out the worst in each other. But when it worked, it was brilliant."

Channelling shared touchstones including Dinosaur Jr and The Yardbirds, with an added dash of Jam, Beatles and Wilko Johnson, it was 18 months before they played their first gigs, fuelled, Bevan says, by "a ton of speed". Press attention followed swiftly, helped by Donna Matthews' new job as Elastica's guitarist.

A 1994 debut single, Happy Shopper, on local label Townhill led to a one-off Rough Trade 45, then RCA signed the band to their 'indie' imprint, Indolent. In a three-month splurge, the Dolls finished writing their first album, then booked into nearby residential studio Rockfield.

Former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler was considered as producer, as was The Who's Pete Townshend, but both were passed over.

"We liked the idea of Townshend, but then someone said, 'Isn't he deaf?'" laughs Bevan. "So instead we went with this guy called Al Clay. On the first day he drove up in his Porsche and told me how much money he had. He looked like [the Harry Enfield character] Loadsa Money. But he was just what we needed. He was a disciplinarian."

With the dissolute group forced to observe a strict noon-to-8pm regimen every day for five weeks, *The Big 3*'s full-blooded, last-chance power rock was soon taking shape.

CREDITS

Tracks: New Loafers / Talk To Me / Stay / Hair / Happy Shopper / The One / Good Times / No.1 Pure Alcohol / Streamlined / Loser / Pig Valentine / Terminal Crash Fear (plus free one-sided 7-inch disc featuring White Knuckle Ride)

Personnel: Richard John Parfitt (vocals/guitar), Mike Cole (vocals/bass), Carl Bevan (drums)

Produced: Al Clay

Recorded: Rockfield Studios, South Wales, spring 1996

Chart peak: Number 36

Available: reissued this month via 3 Loop/Sony

Parfitt's New Loafers, Talk To Me and Stay adhered to a classic R&B/punk template, while the wiggy Streamlined veered into goth-prog territory. Cole pitched in with the delicate, sensuous Hair (which he'd written with Matthews) and chiming The One, rounding out a record whose raw, expressionistic aesthetic was at odds with Britpop's mannered pop – even if its 13 zippy tunes were impossible to excise from the brain.

"It was all about style over technical ability," explains Parfitt. "I liked the editing process – what is the minimum you can get away with? I was never impressed with using lots of chords. It was the Hemingway school of rock'n'roll."

Free to sign a US deal, the Dolls' manager Huw Williams, of Pooh Sticks fame [see Buried Treasure, MOJO 251], brokered a contract with Geffen that was "worth a fortune".

Several tours of America followed, as well as an opening slot for the Sex Pistols at their Finsbury Park reunion show in July 1996. As *The Big 3* reached Number 36, the group seemed invincible, and their self-destructive impulses briefly a virtue.

"We didn't waste the money we got, we spent it on drugs and alcohol," says Bevan. "Richard smashed a lot of beautiful guitars. I remember an early '70s Les Paul Studio that was reduced to matchwood. We wreaked havoc wherever we went – I once challenged Isaac Hayes to a dancing contest in a party in LA. I split my trousers during a tricky Cossack move, my balls fell out, I got thrown out by the bouncers."

In 1998, with a second album, *Joya Magica*, in the bag, the 60ft Dolls were suddenly dropped by RCA in a Jonathan King-orchestrated clearout. The end came a few months later when, after a testing tour, the ever-volatile Cole suffered a total nervous breakdown at Tokyo airport, "a full Syd Barrett job, I could see in his eyes he was never coming back," according to Bevan.

Today, the bassist remains house-bound in Newport, while Bevan owns a studio and drums with Welsh metal-soul band The Lash, and Parfitt holds the post of Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of South Wales.

"We're all still friends, we never fell out, but we can't play again," says Parfitt, a little ruefully. "But *The Big 3* survives as a document of how good we were."

Pat Gilbert

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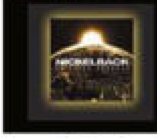
TUE	24	**LONDON** THE SSE ARENA WEMBLEY



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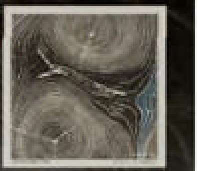

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RAMBLEON

Townes Van Zandt

Texan troubadour.
By Sylvie Simmons.

His life reads like a great American ballad. He was born in Texas to a wealthy, aristocratic oil family, who sent him to military school, then law school, then, after he flipped out and began drinking, to a mental hospital. When he left, he took to the road with his guitar and a pen and never looked back. Townes, as his best friend Guy Clark said, was "a rambling kind of guy".

Along the way Townes met Lightnin' Hopkins, who inspired him to play guitar, Jack Clement, who got him his first record deal, Roky Erickson, whose house and girlfriend he shared, and Mickey Newbury, who encouraged him to write. Man, did he write. As Steve Earle, no slouch himself as a singer-songwriter, famously said, "Townes is the best songwriter in the whole world and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table and say that." Some of those "poem songs", as Townes called them, would become Americana standards, covered by artists including Earle – who recorded a whole album's worth (*Townes*, 2009) – Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Doug Sahm, Lucinda Williams, Emmylou Harris, Lyle Lovett, Cowboy Junkies, Doc Watson, and Dylan.

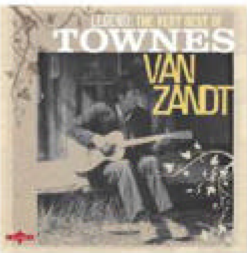
Living on the road: Townes Van Zandt in 1969; (far right) the mature TVZ, after much hard living.

> **"TOWNES IS THE BEST SONG-WRITER IN THE WHOLE WORLD."**
> **Steve Earle**

Be warned, his discography is a minefield. Google "full discography" and, unless you're a diehard completist, you might just weep a little. The majority of his studio albums were released on Poppy and Tomato or Charly, with a number of reissues, and reissues of reissues, and live albums on more record labels than you can count on two hands. They range from his big-production debut studio album to the leanest, sparest solo live tracks he recorded shortly before his death, aged just 52, in 1997. There would be no rehabilitation into popular success, and Townes showed no interest in the music 'business' – which is maybe one of the reasons why his work remains so exceptional.

CAST YOUR VOTES!

This month you chose your Top 10 Townes Van Zandt LPs. Next month we want your Sly Stone and bands Top 10. Send your selections to www.mojo4music.com or e-mail your Top 10 to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Sly Stone' and we'll print the best comments.



10 Townes Van Zandt

Legend: The Very Best Of Townes Van Zandt

CHARLY/SNAPPER 2010. **£9.78**

You say: "An ideal way to get acquainted – take your shoes off." Raymond Croft, via e-mail

For absolute beginners, this two-disc collection harvests 46 songs, mostly from his studio albums. As is the way with Best Ofs, you can argue with the selections, but this choice does include a great many of his best-known compositions, from the signature Pancho And Lefty – covered, notably, by Emmylou Harris and as a duet by Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard – to Waitin' Around To Die. These are lean, wry, beautiful, unflinching songs that tear your heart inside out at the same time as they're showing you what it is to be alive. Bonus tracks include Marie, a duet with Willie Nelson.

Flyin' Shoes
Townes Van Zandt

4 Townes Van Zandt

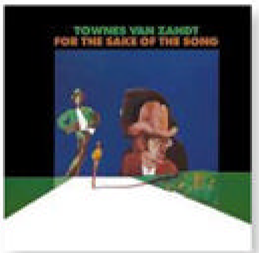
Flyin' Shoes

TOMATO 1978, DOMINO REISSUE 2009, **£7.01**

You say: "*Flyin' Shoes* doesn't have a filler track and hits all the Townes notes – despair, shadows, outlaw swagger, love songs." Chris Iorfida, MOJO Facebook

The five years between *The Late Great* and this follow-up were spent mostly on the road, in the mountains, in a Texas trailer, or in a shack in Tennessee. *Flyin' Shoes* was mad Nashville recorded with a large but sympathetic band, including Randy and Gary Scruggs, Billy Burnette, Bobby Emmons and Spooner Oldham. Van Zandt sounds on fine form and the songs are strong. No Place To Fall – beautifully melodic and not a wasted word – is a classic, as is the desolate title track. But as his countrified Bo Diddley cover Who Do You Love? demonstrates, there's quite a variety here.

Getty Images (2)



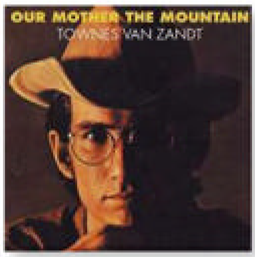
9 Townes Van Zandt

For The Sake Of The Song

POPPY 1968, DOMINO REISSUE 2009, £8.18

You say: "Maligned but, in my view, magnificent." Trevor Scott, via e-mail

Van Zandt's debut album, recorded in 1968, has an extraordinary tracklist, but it also has one of the least appropriate productions that songs like these could possibly receive. Mickey Newbury, who persuaded Townes to come to Nashville, put him in the studio with a team of country session players and producer Jack Clement – a man not known for understatement. And so Sad Cinderella gets Nashvegas female backing singers, Sixteen Summers, Fifteen Falls sounds like the soundtrack to a cowboys and Indians epic and the bleak Waitin' Around To Die is beaten half to death by drums and percussion… still great, though.



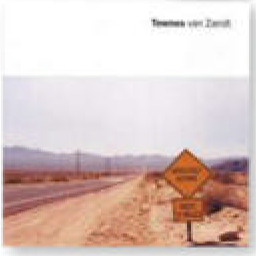
8 Townes Van Zandt

Our Mother The Mountain

POPPY 1969, DOMINO REISSUE 2009, £8.83

You say: "Everyday of the week…" James Endeacott, MOJO Facebook

Townes' second album, *Our Mother The Mountain*, was recorded in "cooler" California with session musicians such as Elvis's guitarist James Burton and Charlie McCoy. Jack Clement was the at the desk again, but co-producer, Kevin Eggers – Townes's manager and Poppy Records owner – seemed to keep the older man's over-the-top inclinations in check. On this album, Townes recorded a far more stripped-down version of Tecumseh Valley, unhappy with the gaudy production on his first album, and the last four tracks are spare and haunting, though Cowboy Jack still managed to 'sweeten' pessimistic St John The Gambler with strings.



7 Townes Van Zandt

Absolutely Nothing

NORMAL 2002, £8.44

You say:" A ragged edge that will draw blood. He may not be entirely 'with it'… (but) REAL as hell." Derek Bryant, MOJO Facebook

After Townes's early recordings, his last. Van Zandt recorded half-a-dozen solo tracks during three different studio sessions in Austin, Texas as a bonus for a 1994 Irish live album – the final one just days before his death. On-stage at McGrory's in Donegal, his voice sounds a little worn at times, but warm on Thunderbird Blues, a paean to drink, and powerful on the stark Kathleen. Bonuses include the weary spiritual Heavenly Houseboat Blues, the affectingly ragged German Mustard (you can hear the saliva in his mouth), a sparkling cover of Dirty Old Town, and a painfully broken Nothin', complete with eerie dead air.

TOWNES VAN ZANDT
ROADSONGS

6 Townes Van Zandt

Roadsongs

SUGAR HILL 1994, NORMAL REISSUE 2003, £9.69

You say: "Shows TVZ's abundant skill as an interpreter." Michael O'Neill, via e-mail

"I wish I'd written every one. No such luck," wrote Townes in his notes on these prime covers recorded live over several years. They range from songs sung by Lightnin' Hopkins and The Carter Family to Hank Williams (You Win Again), Bob Dylan (Little Willie The Gambler), Bruce Springsteen (Racing In The Streets) and, most famously, thanks to its use on the Big Lebowski soundtrack, The Rolling Stones' Dead Flowers. "This collection represents a lot of love and fun," writes Townes, whose reputation as a dark, tortured genius was always at odds with his performances. The Normal edition has 18 tracks compared to Sugar Hill's 15.

High, Low and In Between
Townes Van Zandt

5 Townes Van Zandt

High, Low And In Between

POPPY 1972, REISSUE OMNIVORE 2013, £8.25

You Say: "(One of the) the studio releases I play most." Jason Kerns, MOJO Facebook

Van Zandt's most musically-varied album opens with an uptempo song about Jesus, with joyful, holy-roller piano and a gospel choir. There's also rock'n'roll and country comedy and, of course, those bleak, poetic heart-wrenchers like the title track and You Are Not Needed Now, whose pain is underlined with pedal steel. There's a couple of talking blues, and a new take on an old bluegrass song Blue Ridge Mountains. The classics, though, are Mr Mudd And Mr Gold and To Live Is To Fly – the latter a tribute to Janis Joplin and the song Townes said, if "forced at knife-point", he'd pick as his favourite.

The Late Great Townes Van Zandt

3 Townes Van Zandt

The Late Great

POPPY 1972, REISSUE OMNIVORE 2014, £10.86

You say: "I thought he *was* dead when I first heard it… magical." Ryan Gallagher, via e-mail

So-named after Jerry Jeff Walker found Van Zandt OD'd and in a coma, *The Late Great* also fittingly marked the end of the singer's commercial relationship with Poppy and the beginning of his slide from creativity into a darker, fuzzier world of booze and drugs. As such, it's an album caught between lazy euphoria and darker ruminations. Written in the fourth-floor bedroom of Kevin and Anne Eggers' brownstone in Brooklyn Heights, the album introduces Townes's most-covered song, Pancho And Lefty, the gentle beauty of If I Needed You, and perhaps his most curious and unlikely composition, the serpentine Tolkien-psychedelic Silver Ships Of Andilar.

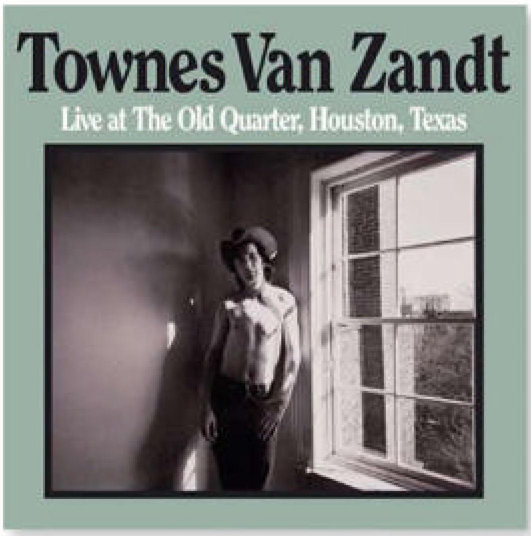
2 Townes Van Zandt

Townes Van Zandt

POPPY 1969, DOMINO REISSUE 2009, £6.88

You say: "My favourite… all killer, no filler!" Stephen Dalrymple, MOJO Facebook

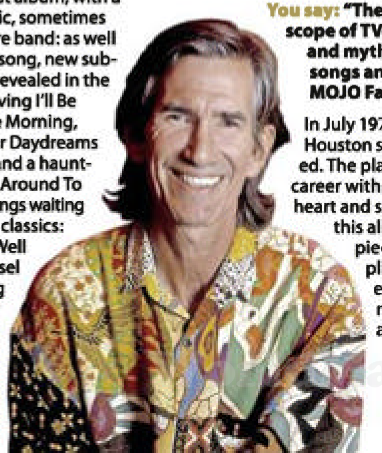
Townes's third LP: 10 sublime songs. Like his debut, it opens with For The Sake Of The Song, but stripped of over-production, it's simply perfect. Less than two years into his career, here he re-records four tracks from his first album, with a sympathetic, sometimes barely-there band: as well as the title song, new subtleties are revealed in the gentle, moving I'll Be Here In The Morning, (Quicksilver Daydreams Of) Maria, and a haunting Waitin' Around To Die. New songs waiting to become classics: Fare Thee Well Miss Carousel and chilling Lungs. Just brilliant.



1 Townes Van Zandt

Live At The Old Quarter, Houston, Texas

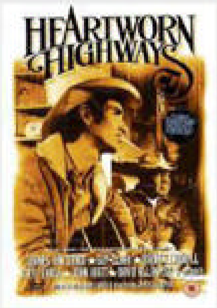
TOMATO 1977, DOMINO REISSUE 2009, £11.24



You say: "The perfect introduction… the entire scope of TVZ's writing, from total despair and mythical storytelling to sweet love songs and some humour, too." Janne Oinonen, MOJO Facebook

In July 1973, Townes played a residency at a Houston saloon where his friend Earl Willis recorded. The plan was to help Van Zandt's then-ailing career with a solo live album. He took the idea to heart and stayed pretty sober. The two shows on this album are simply spellbinding, his masterpiece. Really, it's all here, the graceful simplicity of the songs and his delivery, the engaging mix of light – the talking blues numbers and between-song anecdotes – and dark (Waiting 'Round To Die; Lungs).

NOW DIG THIS



Documentary (Normal, 1997) features radio interviews with Van Zandt. Visuals? Heartworn Highways, a film documentary on Townes and Texan singer-songwriters is a must (DVD; Snapper, 2005). There are several tribute albums, the best being *Poet: A Tribute To Townes Van Zandt* (Catfish 2002) with Guy Clark, Steve Earle, Willie Nelson, Cowboy Junkies, Emmylou and Lucinda. As for books, there's The Ballad Of The Late Great Townes Van Zandt by John Kruth (2008); A Deeper Blue: The Life And Music Of Townes Van Zandt by Robert Earl Hardy (2009); I'll Be Here In The Morning: The Songwriting Legacy Of Townes Van Zandt by Brian T. Atkinson (2011). And, at the risk of a journalistic selfie, there's MOJO 113's six-page feature from April 2003.

Digging your scene

Hip new journalistic memoir from pop's golden age. By Mark Paytress.

Shake It Up Baby! Notes From A Pop Music Reporter 1961-1972

★★★★

Norman Jopling

ROCKHISTORY.CO.UK. £12.99

On May 8, 1963, an issue of New Record Mirror hit the London streets with a lead story that had enormous unforeseen consequences. Titled "The Rolling Stones – Genuine R&B!", the full-page feature raved about a group of "wild, exciting white boys… genuine R&B fanatics" who were attracting crowds of 400 to the Station Hotel in Richmond every Sunday. Trad was dead, the piece declared. London's hip kids were now "throwing themselves about to the new 'jungle music'."

The author of that piece was Norman Jopling, forever known as the writer who gave the Stones their first national exposure. Jopling's voluminous, anecdote-rich account of his extraordinary decade at the forefront of pop journalism now puts that piece in context, while providing a near forensic guide to the fast-changing musical fashions of the golden age.

> "AFTER JOPLING DECLARED OTIS REDDING WAS 'CORNY', RECORD MIRROR WAS DELUGED WITH A HUGE POSTBAG."

A sharp-suited young modernist with a Vespa GS, Jopling had little interest in seeing the homegrown R&B hopefuls. "They'll be rubbish," he told NRM's Peter Jones, who'd assigned him the job. But as the Stones cranked out their rowdy repertoire of Jimmy Reed, Chuck Berry and throbbing Bo Diddley rhythms, his cynicism evaporated. "We could do it," whispered the voice in his head. "White people could do it."

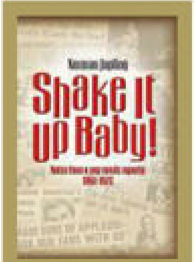
Shake It Up Baby!, which is split roughly 50/50 between original writings/interviews and new commentary, is an ideal bedmate for Brian Matthew's Saturday morning Radio 2 show. There's Chubby Checker teaching the cub reporter how to Twist ("You're stubbing out a cigarette with your foot while drying your back with a bath towel"); numerous tales of the "The Bachelors Slam Dylan!" variety; soul enthusiast Guy Stevens turning up at the RM office one day psyched out in bells, beads and "half-a-Hendrix" hair; Scott Walker griping; Reparata And The Delrons desperate to sing "obscene" Mothers and Fugs songs; and Captain Beefheart issuing grave warnings about Ronald Reagan – in 1968.

But the deeper story, the one that explains why Jopling's initial wariness of the Stones turned to rabid enthusiasm, is the writer's early and enduring passion for R&B. Amidst all the "Girls' Names And Hit Records!" "flannel" pieces was Jopling's unprecedented coverage of the sound of black America, especially Tamla and Chess artists. It was largely his input that made Record Mirror (the 'New' was dropped in '63) *the* magazine for R&B enthusiasts. Jopling didn't mind courting the odd controversy either. After declaring Otis Redding "exceptionally corny" on the '67 Stax/Volt tour, RM was deluged with a huge postbag. Wary of glib, divisive definitions, the writer's waspish response was that he'd simply go back to his Nina Simone, Impressions and Miracles records "and forget all about 'soul'…"

Dave Godin and Pete Meaden also make notable cameos, with ex-Who image-maker Meaden introducing Jopling to acid, Captain Beefheart, independent record production and the dangers of "packing heat", before he's carted off to a secure hospital ward.

Jopling, who quit RM in summer '68 to travel and revamp his writing technique, survived to tell many more decent tales – Richard Branson, Dylan, Hendrix, Bowie. But in terms of impact and kudos, all the real action comes in the first two-thirds of the book. Proof that it wasn't all "What's your favourite colour?" in the '60s fan sheets.

Credit in



WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Little Eeefin Annie, a 1963 single by Joe Perkins, was part of a short-lived 'eefing' craze, described here as "a vocal sound made by panting violently, noisily and extremely quickly, which felt dangerously self-harming…"
- Reviewing The Who and Jimi Hendrix's January 1967 Saville Theatre show, Jopling called the guitarist's playing "predictable and noisy" and The Who "the worst I'd ever seen them." Future Charisma boss Tony Stratton-Smith wrote in to ask, "Is the time not right for Norman Jopling to retire?"
- In 1967, Jopling and Pete Meaden formed New Wave Productions, releasing two acid-folk 45s by Midlands quartet Peep Show via Polydor.
- Phil Spector's reasoning for sticking instrumentals on his B-sides: "I like to give value-for-money singles… rather than have an inferior flipside I'd sooner have my studio musicians do an instrumental."

Top table: Norman interviews The Four Tops (from left) Jopling, Levi Stubbs, Renaldo 'Obie' Benson (standing), Lawrence Payton, Abdul 'Duke' Fakir.

The continuous rebel: David Bowie, progression not reinvention.

Alamy

Mr Mojo: A Biography Of Jim Morrison

★★

Dylan Jones

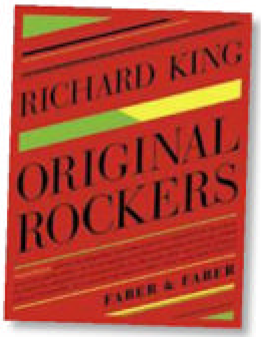
BLOOMSBURY. £8.99

A flippant profile that brings nothing new to the story.

JIM MORRISON
MR MOJO

With so many great books on The Doors and Jimbo already filling the shelves – Ray Manzarek and John Densmore's respective autobiographies, No One Here Gets Out Alive by Danny Sugerman, et al – the pressure falls on new arrivals to dig deep. This slim, irreverent portrait claims to uncover the real Jim Morrison: "a self-obsessed drunk whose ridiculous good looks and rich baritone contributed unduly to an archetype that would define both him and every copycat who came in his wake." Jones, editor of GQ and author of David Cameron's Cameron On Cameron: Conversations With Dylan Jones, revels in grubby stories, quoting at length the likes of Grace Slick (on Jim's cock size) and David Crosby (on puking on the carpet) and concludes "his life remains a prototype of immaturity". With The Doors themselves sidelined, there's no counter balance: this is simply the case for the prosecution.

Lois Wilson



Original Rockers

★★★★

Richard King

FABER & FABER. £19

The best record shops were always more than just places to buy music…

Part time capsule, part history lesson, part musical treasure map, Original Rockers goes beyond recalling King's several years working at Bristol's Revolver Records during the 1990s. Offering insights into the idiosyncratic, often comically dysfunctional world behind the counter, King unashamedly romanticises those pre-internet days when musical knowledge was hard won rather than a mouse-click away. Frequently venturing into the margins to highlight a choice selection of game-changing artists and genres, he provides tantalising introductions to the likes of Can, Lee Perry, Sun Ra and Cornelius Cardew. Snapshots of the city's heritage – he intertwines Revolver's history with Bristol's own – from reggae sound systems and The Pop Group to Sarah Records and Massive Attack, further enrich this paean to a time before the worldwide web changed music forever.

Andrew Carden

Rebel Rebel

★★★★

Chris O'Leary

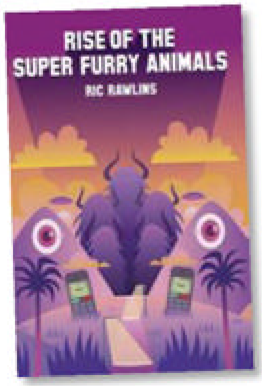
ZERO BOOKS. £23.99

Part 1 of a new Bowie bible takes us from Liza Jane to *Station To Station*.

REBEL REBEL

In 2009, the webzine Drowned In Sound ran an article titled "Beyond The Death Of The Critic". In a nutshell, its argument ran, why do we need books, authors and paid 'experts' when bloggers and online commentators have taken over? Rebel Rebel is a genuinely new type of Bowie book. This work started life as the blog Pushing Ahead Of The Dame, and as Chris O'Leary acknowledges, the comments and corrections to the original text from readers have improved it immeasurably. Like Peter Doggett's The Man Who Sold The World, the blueprint for the book is Iain MacDonald's Revolution In The Head. The detail is, at times, breathtaking, the cultural contextualising mostly secure, and the analysis quirky and honest. Writing on the title track of *Diamond Dogs*, for example, he says that it "has never sounded quite right… overlong… repurposed". Unlike some writers, O'Leary is keen to point to the continuity in Bowie's work (and as such will find favour with the man himself), signalling that chord progressions, vocal tricks, themes and obsessions are reused and a new Bowie emerges, not one of reinvention after all.

David Buckley



Rise Of The Super Furry Animals

★★★★

Ric Rawlins

THE FRIDAY PROJECT. £6.99

High times with the Cardiff space cadets.

From illegal pirate radio transmitters secreted in the slate quarries around Bethesda to driving a techno-pumping tank (bought from an arms dealer called Baz; sold to Don Henley) to Eisteddfod, through to hanging with Howard Marks in Majorca and Andrew Loog Oldham in Bogota, this telling of the SFA tale exceeds expectation. Like Funkadelic raised on Druidic folklore or an acid house Beach Boys, Gruff Rhys and co were a band who benefited from Creation's post-Oasis spending spree. And why not? Britpop was one-dimensional; the world lacked psychedelic Welsh-language funsters (though on first seeing them play, Alan McGee advised they sing in English – they just had). 'Cinematising' various scenes in the band's colourful ascendancy, including their chaotic early years with Rhys Ifans on vocals, Rawlins skips the dull bits and turns this into a gonzo story that has shades of Julian Cope's similarly psychotropic madventures in Head On and Repossessed.

Ben Myers

Glen Campbell: Life With My Father

★★

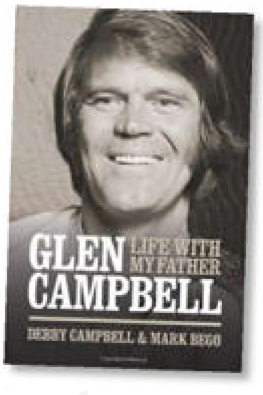
Debby Campbell & Mark Bego

OMNIBUS. £16.95

An adoring daughter's rose-tinted memoir.

As part of Glen Campbell's stage act for 24 years, eldest daughter Debby should be uniquely placed to offer insight into the great man. You'll find little illumination here, however. Debby's relationship with her father was sporadic during his most turbulent years, her attempts to live with him in the '70s a still-untold story of Hollywood parties that she was only ever on the outskirts of. Her discovery that daddy was a cokehead is all but swept under the rug but an innocuous case of mistaken identity in a grocery store warrants over a page, while the gushing showbiz tales and repetitive family detail wear quickly. Faced with Glen's slow fade into Alzheimer's and cut out of his final tour by his fourth wife, at 58 Debby still seems a lost little girl already grieving for her dad.

Andy Fyfe



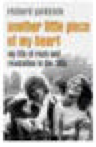
Another Little Piece Of My Heart: My Life Of Rock And Revolution In The '60s

★★★

Richard Goldstein

BLOOMSBURY. £17.20

How To Be A Rock Critic 101.



"Pop Eye" – Richard Goldstein's column in New York's Village Voice – first ran in 1966, and he's often cited as the first "serious" rock critic. His advantage as fan, street freak, political rad and literate academic distinguished him from trade and teen rag rats. Given this singularity, he invented his gig – and his description of the process is fascinating. (He points out that the freedom he was afforded thanks to editors' countercultural cluelessness was crucial.) Interactions with John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Jim Morrison, Brian Wilson and – especially – his friendship with Janis Joplin bring the reader intimately into the time, yet Goldstein seems embarrassed by the spontaneity of his youthful writings. Lacking said spontaneity, much of the book is ponderous about an era that was anything but, and there are too many factual errors. The cliché "If you remember the '60s, you weren't there" is operative – Goldstein was definitely there.

Michael Simmons

Epic soundtracks

Glasgow's art-rock legends are still alive and kicking, and learning new tricks. By **Keith Cameron**.

Simple Minds
Capitol, Hannover

The influence of Simple Minds is now a given. In deploying futurist gestures amid a communitarian ethic, the band's hallmark early-'80s work anticipated Arcade Fire and other contemporary new wave gravatars, while Manic Street Preachers, Billy Corgan, King Creosote et al queue to pay respect. Rather less acknowledged, however, is Jim Kerr's terpsichorean legacy. On a crisp Hannover evening, the Minds' frontman crams his full repertoire of shimmies, hip-wiggles, knee-drops and full-on audience supplication into the techno-fied Canned Heat roll of set-opener Let The Day Begin. It becomes clear where Future Islands' Samuel T. Herring got the dance moves that wowed the world last year: verily, JK's disco pants are the best. Now 55, knowingly camp in frock coat and pink scarf, there's a dandyish hint of the *capo dei capi* about Kerr. As the song surges, he executes a little hand-jive – and the heaving Capitol dutifully melts at his feet.

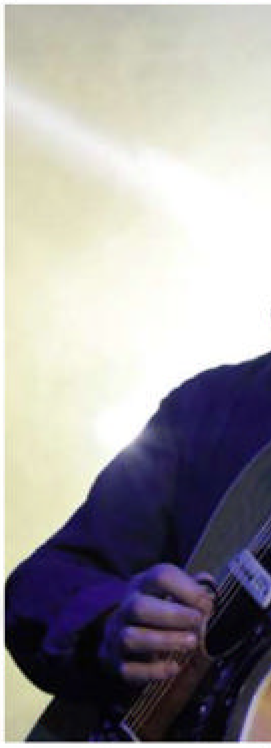
They'll work grander halls on this tour, but nothing is taken for granted. Just three hours earlier, Kerr had paced the empty venue as the band soundchecked Honest Town, a keynote song in this current renaissance, even stopping them to fine-tune the arrangement. Simple Minds' latest reinvention – in essence, a leaner 21st century update of the peak era's pomp and circumstance – justifies the piecemeal shifts in sound and personnel that culminated when bassist Ged Grimes joined established keyboardist Andy Gillespie in filling the giant shoes left long ago by Derek Forbes and Mick MacNeil. The upshot was 2014's shiny *Big Music*, for which this Hannover gig is the tenth in an almighty two-part/no-support, 59-date victory parade through Europe then into the UK.

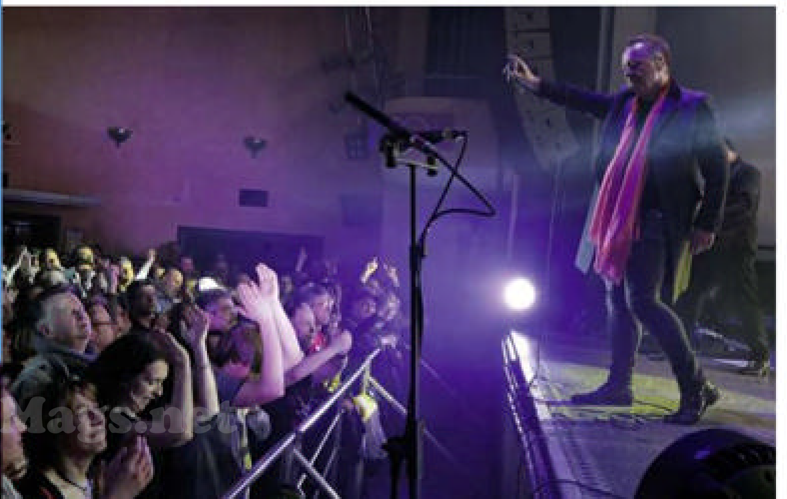
Tantalised by Kerr's promise that every night's setlist will be different, MOJO's strategic targeting of the first German show pays handsome dividends, as both Hunter And The Hunted and I Travel make their debuts. Written 35 years ago, the latter's tense Cold War discostompf retains its eerie currency ("In central Europe some men are marching") and both songs feature telling contributions from Catherine Anne Davies, the latest addition to the line-up, whose presence indicates the Minds' pan-generational reach. Crimson of hair and ethereally voiced, playing both guitar and keyboards, her Minds education came from hearing the '80s hits in her mum's car and being a huge Manics fan. Having already contributed to an inspired triple-acoustic reworking of The American, she then takes lead vocal on Rivers Of Ice – "her Bat For Lashes moment," Kerr notes to MOJO later – a striking treatment that also features Charlie Burchill slinging aside the big white Gretsch to play violin. Soon, though, the guitarist is dealing his hallmark shimmers and crescendos on Waterfront, grinning as mighty drummer Mel Gaynor dispatches the song's metronomic industrial drama. By way of light relief, the ensuing Don't You (Forget About Me) ends the first set on a note of easy intoxication.

After a 15-minute break, the other female weapon in the Minds armoury takes centre-stage on skyscraper heels: having provided Chaka Khan and Stevie Wonder with backing vocals, Sarah Brown unquestionably has the soul diva chops to transform Book Of Brilliant Things and East At Easter into a spaced house medley. With Kerr returning in a red tartan version of his first-half apparel, she then provides the heavy lifting on the powerhouse refrains of Once Upon A Time and All The Things She Said. Witnessing the current model Minds compact these gargantuan tunes, and in such a relatively intimate setting, creates such an energy surge that a subsequent detour into the pastel chintz of Let There Be Love and Let It All Come Down inevitably derails the momentum. But it's the only such instance, and redemption soon arrives with the sainted Someone Somewhere (In Summertime), a perfect bridgehead for the celebratory push on to Sanctify Yourself, via Midnight Walking, another *Big Music* song that proves the band can contextualise themselves within a past/future continuum. "You feel there's something new," Kerr says to MOJO afterwards. "And let's be honest, at this stage of the game, for us to be an organism that's still growing, is very pleasing."

Throughout their existence, a permanent dilemma for Simple Minds has been how to harmonise contradictory inputs: art and commerce, alienation and empathy, cold and heat. So much time and effort was spent trying to replace lost firepower. But, as the latest album's bittersweet jewel Spirited Away leads into Love Song and ultimately the irrepressible Alive And Kicking, it feels like this big music is on the march once again.

> "VERILY, JIM KERR'S DISCOPANTS ARE THE BEST."





In central Europe, some men are prancing: (main image) Simple Minds' Jim Kerr, terpsichorean legend; (centre row, from left) Charlie Burchill gets the big music marching; Kerr leads the choir; Sarah Brown; (bottom row, from left) Jim sports the tartan and greets the Capitol; Burchill, guitar shimmerer; Kerr and Catherine Anne Davies.

Andrew Cotterill (8)

SETLIST

Let The Day Begin / Blindfolded / Stars Will Lead The Way / New Gold Dream (81, 82, 83, 84) / The American / Hunter And The Hunted / Honest Town / I Travel / Rivers Of Ice / Dolphins / Waterfront / Don't You (Forget About Me) / Book Of Brilliant Things / East At Easter / Once Upon A Time / All The Things She Said / Let There Be Love / Let It All Come Down / Someone Somewhere (In Summertime) / Midnight Walking / Big Music / Sanctify Yourself / Spirited Away / Love Song / Riders On The Storm / Alive And Kicking

OldMags.net

Renewed faith

New generation country star and former troubled soul finds solace in church. By Andy Fyfe.

Justin Townes Earle

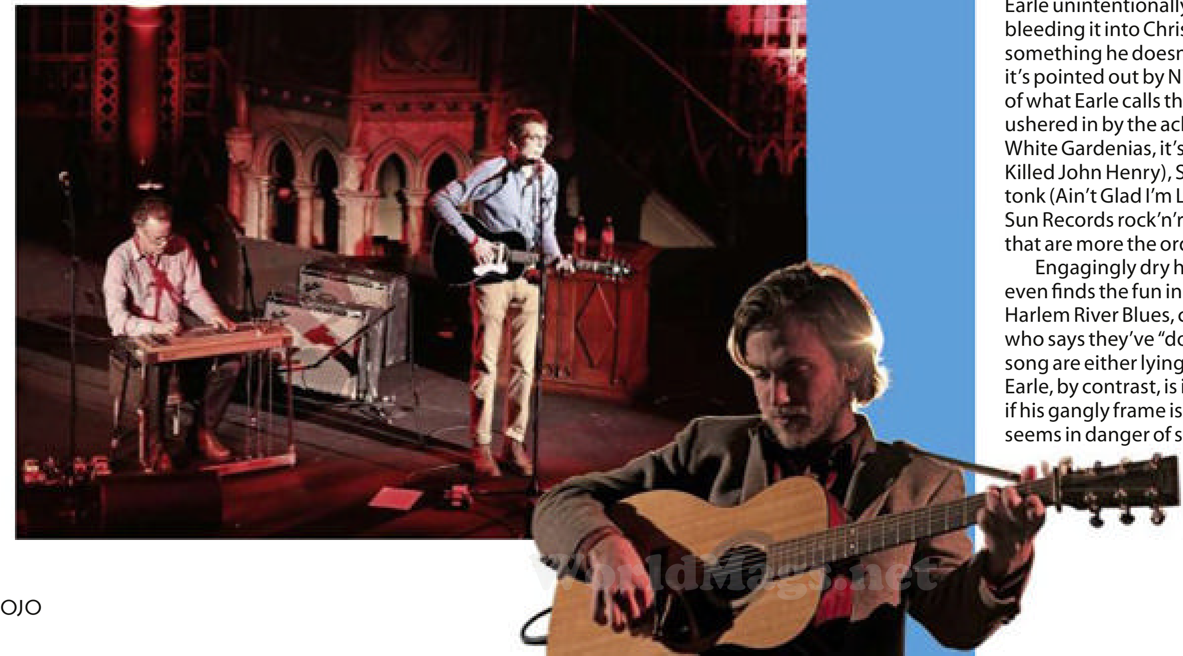
Union Chapel, London

Beneath a black wide-brimmed hat, Georgie looks like a female James Bay. Having only recently given up a life of grime, the 19-year-old is a country convert. She used to laugh at her dad's fondness for men called Randy and Merle, but thanks to Music City's very own super-soap Nashville (Dallas with a T Bone Burnett-curated soundtrack), she's hooked.

Nestled in her dad's record collection were a few Steve Earle albums, too, and now she's transfixed as his son tears through an acoustic set of weepsome and wanton songs. Georgie is hardly an anomaly in an audience that, although far from diverse, is encouragingly young. For so long the domain of big hats and downhome hokum, something is stirring in Nashville that's broadening country's appeal, helped along by a new cadre of hip young artists.

One of them is tonight's support, Andrew Combs, once a jobbing staff songwriter in Nashville whose prodigious potential comes dangerously close to upstaging his host.

Ironically for someone still viewed by many as "Steve's boy", 33-year-old Justin Townes Earle is, by comparison, an old-timer. Americana has been a convenient mast for him to nail his colours to since his 2007 debut mini-album *Yuma*, but his heart has always been in old-school country.



Way beyond Nashville: Justin Townes Earle (above) finds the fun in gospel dread; (below, left) Earle with Paul Niehaus (seated); (inset) Andrew Combs, prodigious potential.

"HIS HEART HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN OLD-SCHOOL COUNTRY."

With bluesy licks from Calexico/Lambchop guitarist Paul Niehaus – Earle's only accompanist, occasionally switching to pedal steel – and the headliner's own, self-professed "weird" percussive playing, the duo race through the set, hellbent, it seems, on getting the plane home tomorrow.

An addict since his teens and a long-troubled soul, Earle is now clean and recently married, so maybe his preference for being at home these days is understandable. As much as domestication suits him, however, it's other kin who loom largest tonight, the set heavily reliant on songs from last year's *Single Mothers* album, written largely for and around his own mom.

Surprisingly, only two tracks from its companion record *Absent Fathers* get a look in, and one of those, Call Ya Momma, Earle unintentionally screws up by bleeding it into Christchurch Woman, something he doesn't even realise until it's pointed out by Niehaus later. In spite of what Earle calls the "downer segment" ushered in by the aches and arches of White Gardenias, it's ragtime blues (They Killed John Henry), South Seas honky tonk (Ain't Glad I'm Leaving) and primal, Sun Records rock'n'roll (My Baby Drives) that are more the order of the day.

Engagingly dry humoured, Earle even finds the fun in the gospel dread of Harlem River Blues, claiming anyone who says they've "done the things in this song are either lying or badly diseased". Earle, by contrast, is in rude health, even if his gangly frame is so stick-thin it seems in danger of slipping between the floorboards in front of the chapel's altar. Country couldn't be in better hands.

SETLIST

Burning Pictures / One More Night In Brooklyn / Ain't Waitin' / Memphis In The Rain / White Gardenias / Worried 'Bout The Weather / Am I That Lonely Tonight? / Call Ya Momma / Christchurch Woman / Learning To Cry / Nothings Gonna Change The Way You Feel About Me Now / They Killed John Henry / Mama's Eyes / When The One You Love Loses Faith / My Baby Drives / Single Mothers / Ain't Glad I'm Leaving / Today And A Lonely Night / Can't Hardly Wait / Dreams / Harlem River Blues

Andrew Cotterill (3)

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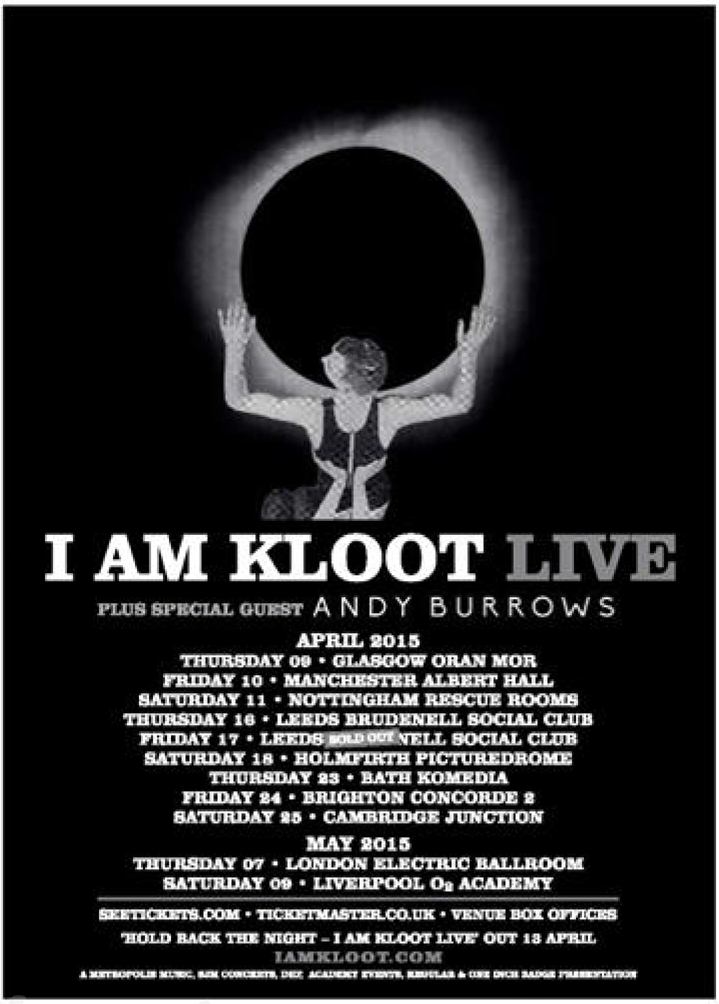

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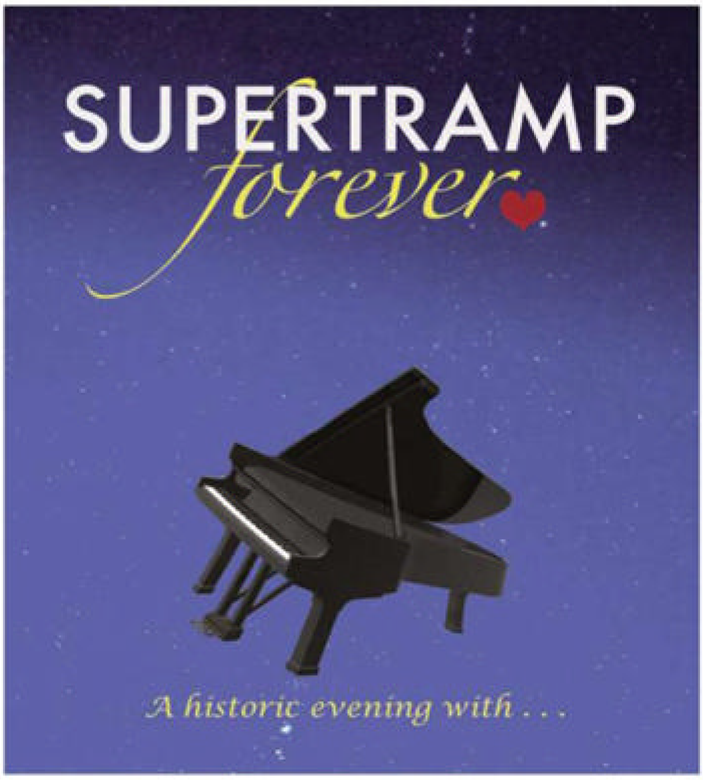

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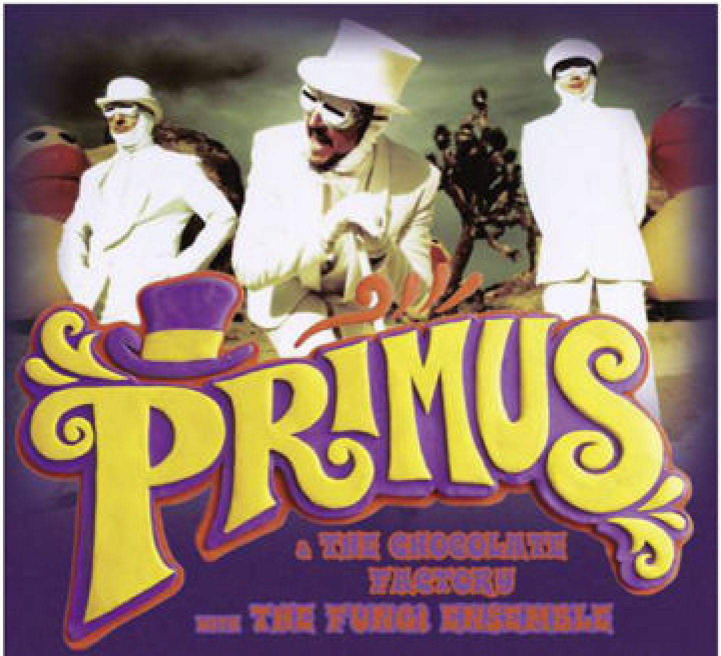

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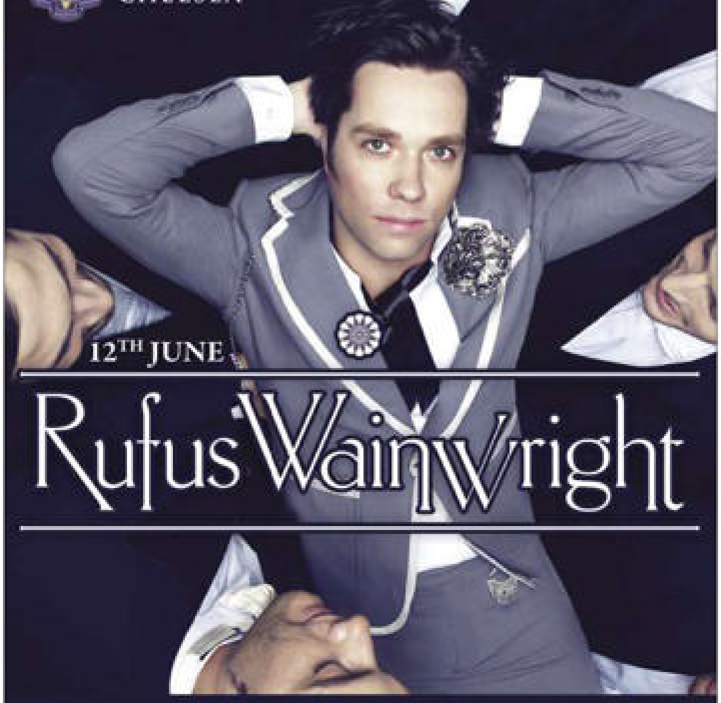

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COWBOYSONGS

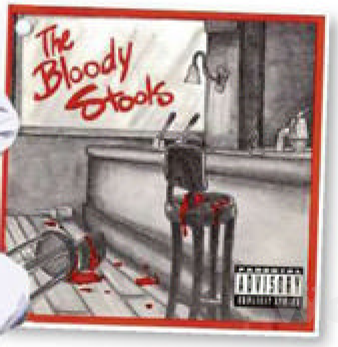
WAS RONNIE RAYGUN'S DAUGHTER A POP STAR?

Feel utter dread at contact with unknown spheres and powers? Time for some punk medicine, anonymous rocking and chiropody.

I recall US President Reagan's daughter coming to London in the early '80s to record an album. Was it ever released?
Dom Ferguson, via e-mail

Fred says: The black sheep of the Reagan family, Patricia Ann Davis Reagan came to London in early 1983 and recorded the album *Patti Davis* for Runaway Records at PRT Studios. Produced by Steve Colyer, it featured 12 tracks, spanning pop to country, including seven self-penned songs. Peter Holt, music columnist for the London Standard, was given an exclusive preview of the album by the then 29-year-old singer and claimed: "I can vouch that it is an impressive debut from the president's singer-guitarist-songwriter daughter. President Reagan can sleep easy as far as one aspect is concerned. Known for her anti-nuclear views, Patti has steered away from anything controversial." That year Davis was announced as an entrant for the Seoul Song Festival, while the tapes from her Runaway sessions were on offer at the MIDEM music biz gathering in Cannes. Davis, who once lived with Bernie Leadon and co-wrote the track I Wish You Peace for the Eagles, hit the headlines again in 1994 when, aged 41, she appeared on the cover of Playboy. The author of several books, Davis became increasingly reconciled with her family as her father's Alzheimer's worsened and she was at his bedside when the end came in 2004.

Mysterious and Nukey: (clockwise from main) US President Ronald Reagan and daughter Patricia in the White House Oval Office, January 1981; Sergei Rachmaninov at the ivories; The Bloody Stools' LP cover; punk rock chiropractor Dr Terry Chimes; Oxford Street rogue Shaun Ryder.



DID OXFORD STREET ROCK?

I recently read a magazine from November 1991 which mentioned a Channel 4 film, The Ghosts Of Oxford Street. According to the report: "Happy Mondays will be making their acting debuts as convicted highwaymen. The band will be starring alongside Kirsty MacColl, The Pogues and Tom Jones in the movie." I have never seen this film and I was wondering if it was available on DVD or if it was due for a screening?
V. Waters, Watford, Herts

Fred says: No DVD of this Malcolm McLaren creation is available but you can still watch it via Channel 4oD's catch-up service. Not a total success, the film also featured Sinéad O'Connor and Rebel MC, and has its share of stick-in-the-mind moments – how can anyone resist Happy Mondays covering the Bee Gees' Stayin' Alive? BMG issued the soundtrack in December 1991.

DYLAN'S RACH'N'ROLL?

I've just been listening, via YouTube, to Full Moon And Empty Arms, a track from Bob Dylan's album of Sinatra covers. I checked and found that the song was written by Kaye & Mossman. But surely it's a piece of classical music with a pop lyric. What is the original piece?
Terry Fox, via e-mail

Fred says: Full Moon And Empty Arms, a US Top 20 hit for Frank Sinatra in 1946, is based on a theme from Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2 In C Minor. One of two versions to enter the Top 20 at the same time, the original was by bandleader Ray Noble. The popularity of the Concerto at the time doubtless owed everything to the fact that it was used as a musical backdrop to David Lean's film Brief Encounter. More recently, Muse adapted one of the themes from the Piano Concerto for part of their 2001 song Space Dementia.

WAS BON JOVI A STOOL PIGEON?

Can you tell me anything about an album called *Meet The Bloody Stools*? I've been told that it's actually a Jon Bon Jovi LP. I checked online and it's mentioned with a tracklist including Crap, Straight To Uranus and others with equally dodgy titles. But no personnel is listed. Is it a Bon Jovi project or is this just a fallacy?
Dave Gurlick, via e-mail

Fred says: The album, which emerged on the indie Ill Records in May 1991, is not a Bon Jovi release, though Richie Sambora and Jon Bon Jovi are alleged to have taken part in the recording of this bizarre heavy rock LP. Jon Bon Jovi claimed his voice was sampled, but Ill Records insisted he actually contributed, adding: "The only condition was that we were not allowed to use his name on the sleeve." From various reports the band seemingly first surfaced in Philadelphia but no longer appear to be active, a recent message to MOJO via Facebook stating: "Currently the members of the band are scattered in different parts of the States and abroad. The band did a 'reunion' show in May of 2014 for the anniversary of a local rock club in which they used to play way back, though actually it was just Frankie, the singer, with a bunch of fine local players filling in. Although its [sic] been many years since the band had some notoriety, we still get requests for CDs (which we'll burn for our fans) and we have seen a bit of a resurgence in T-shirt sales."

HELP FRED…

Having just watched the Essential Clash DVD and consequently having The Clash in my mind I was surprised to find a leaflet on the doormat today for a local chiropractor, one Dr Terry Chimes DC, yes it is he – Mr Tory Crimes. I wondered whether MOJO readers knew of any other ex-punks or otherwise who are now part of the medical establishment?
Gary Axis, via e-mail

CONTACTFRED

Write to: Ask Fred, MOJO, Endeavour House, 189 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8JG.

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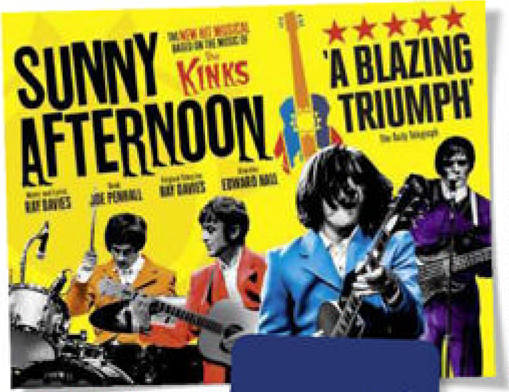

WIN! A West End break to see The Kinks' musical Sunny Afternoon.

"I've always expressed my feelings best in song," mused Ray Davies on bringing The Kinks' story to the stage. "There is a key line in the musical, 'I think in song', and it's true."

You can see how true with this month's crossword prize: we're giving one lucky reader and a guest the chance to win a West End break to see Sunny Afternoon in two of the best available seats at the Harold Pinter Theatre. With music and lyrics by Ray, book by Joe Penhall and direction by Edward Hall, it depicts the highs and lows of The Kinks' rise to stardom, soundtracked by such immortal hits as You Really Got Me, Waterloo Sunset and Lola.

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So get Boxcar Dellar's crossword sliced and diced and send the finished version to Thank You For The Play, MOJO, 3rd Floor, Endeavour House, 189 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2 8JG. The closing date is **April 30, 2015.** For the rules of the quiz, send an SAE to that same address.

For more information and to book tickets visit: sunnyafternoonthemusical.com or call 0844 871 7622

Terms and Conditions: Tickets valid for selected performances until May 28. Hotel stay is for night of performance only and is based on two people sharing a double or twin room. Subject to availability. Non-transferable. No cash alternative. Additional expenses are the responsibility of the prizewinner.

ANSWERS

MOJO 256

Across: 1 Scott Walker, 6 Pyre, 10 *After The Gold Rush*, 12 *Thing-fish*, 14 *A Passion Play*, 18 Iggy Pop, 19 Suzanne, 20 *Europa*, 22 *Tapestry*, 23/25 down *Oil On Canvas*, 25 *C.S.N*, 27 *U.S.A.*, 29/30 Ode To My Family, 32 *No Angel*, 34 *Eden*, 35 *Aerial*, 37 Easy, 38 Zydeco, 42 *Kickback*, 43 Tanita, 44 Seefeel, 45 *Indie Cindy*, 47 *Parade*, 49 *Faith*, 51 Morgan Fisher, 53 Poe, 54 *Lola*, 56 Little Steven, 57 Eric B, 58 Meat.

Down: 1 Shaun Ryder, 2 Out Of Control, 3 Thrash, 4 Ash, 5/26 across Enola Gay, 7 You Love Us, 8 Echo Park, 9 Odyssey, 11 Eva, 13 High And Dry, 15 *Pearl*, 16 Alphabet Street, 17 Autobahn, 21 Lynyrd Skynyrd, 24/41 across Nuyorican Soul, 28 Angel Of Harlem, 31 Ida, 33 American Pie, 36 Lowe, 38 Z.Z. Top, 39 Ora, 40 Okie, 44 Syreeta, 46 Ifield, 48 Emeli, 50 Heart, 52 Note, 55 One.

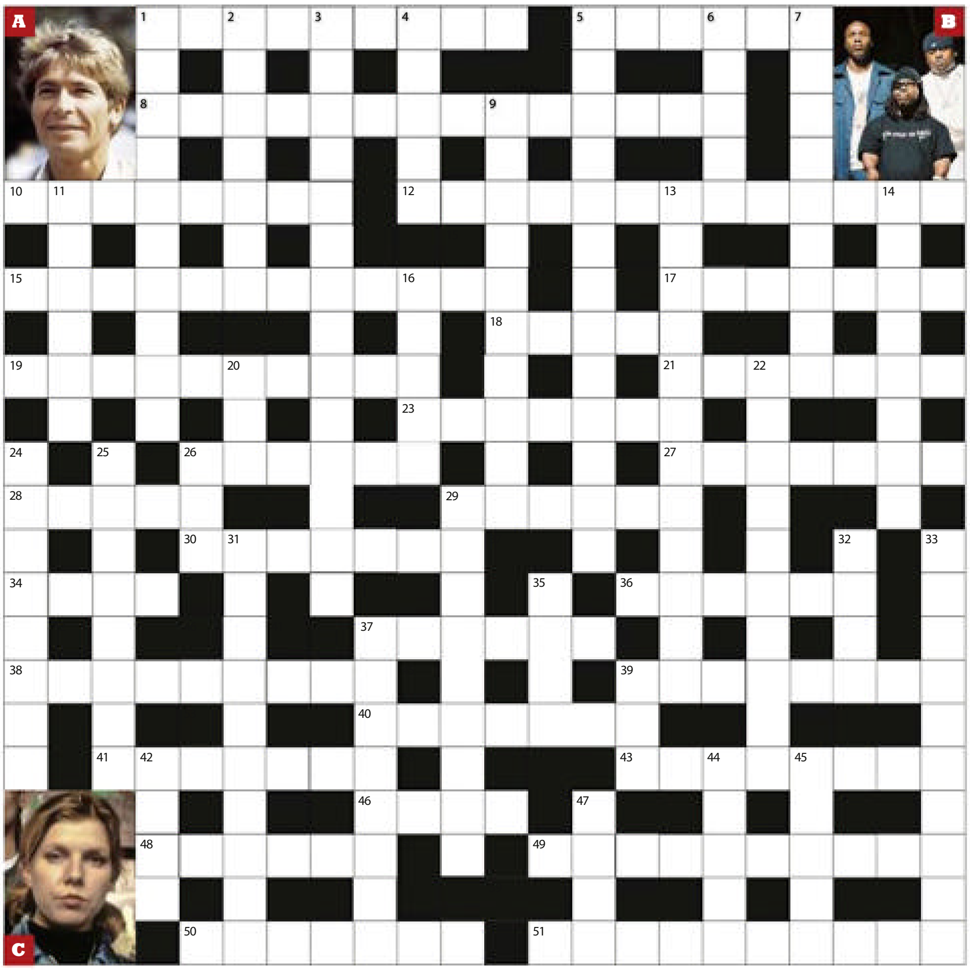
Winner: Adrian Holmes of **Stanhope, County Durham,** wins a set of AKG Professional's K812 headphones.

ACROSS

1 Former Dain Bramage sticksman (4,5)
5 ------ *Than The Speed Of Night* (Bonnie Tyler album) (6)
8 One of The Ravishing Beauties (8,6)
10 Mott The Hoople album suitable for Sir David Attenborough? (8)
12 Elkie Brooks gets wise for a hit (2,4,3,4)
15 Just the trip for a Bob Marley live album (7,2,3)
17 A lack of forgiveness from The Stranglers (2,5)
18 A lip-smackin' good Kelis album? (5)
19 See photoclue A (4,6)
21 -- ---- For Living (Joy Division EP) (2,5)
23 Duck! Here come those ex-members of Beefheart's Magic Band (7)
26 Joni Mitchell album that contained Furry Sings The Blues (6)
27 Sex And -------- (Motörhead) (7)
28 Mediterranean island linked with electronic and techno sounds (5)
29/36 Van Morrison album made after his return to Ireland in 1973 (6,6)
30 Linkin Park album that takes you to the Greek (7)
34 Could be Heavy Metal or New On The Block (4)
36 See 29 across
37 They made a *Journey To The Centre Of The Eye* (6)
38 US rapper whose albums include *Cheers* and *Second Round's On Me* (4,5)
39 Kim Salty changes into a rapper from New Orleans (8)
40 Van Halen's state of equilibrium (7)
41 Pink Floyd once had a foot in it for a compilation (3,4)
43 See photoclue B (4,4)
46 They were high for Iron Maiden in 1984 (4)
48 Don't Cha was a Number 1 for this Busta and the Pussycat Dolls (6)
49 See 31 Down
50 Manics single that caused waves? (7)
51 Where The Carpenters longed to be (5,2,3)

DOWN

1 This was not his beautiful wife – or house! (5,5)
2 Originally a prog label, famed for its swirl design (7)
3 Robert Pollard's band – led aurally it seems (6,2,6)
4 The Beatles' glass vegetable (5)
5 Samuel T. Herring's synth-pop band (6,7)
6 Her LPs include *In The Court Of The Crimson Queen* (5)
7 Monmouth recording complex that in 1965 became the first residential studio in the world (9)
9 Coloured like Elvis Costello's 1981 Nashville album (6,4)
11 The Who's 1966 gender discovery (2,1,3)
13 See photoclue C (5,7)
14 *Wind* -- ----- (Scorpions album) (2,6)
16 Land of a Tom Waits shave (5)
20 Woman who inspired an album by The Alan Parsons Project (3)
22 Numerical conclusion reached by Rob Base and DJ EZ Rock (2,5,3)
24 Nickname 'Basher', middle name 'Drain' (4,4)
25 Strange present, this album by X (4,4)
26 Pete, once of Badfinger (3)
29 He portrayed Jim Morrison in the Doors biopic (3,6)
31/49 Morrissey's Sabbath similarity (8,2,4,6)
32 His *Morning Phase* was MOJO's Album of 2014 (4)
33 Elvis Presley's cry for a missing person? (3,4,3)
35 Madonna in need of an umbrella? (4)
37 Springsteen's song about Charles Starkweather (8)
39 White Stripes' drummer White (3)
42 Bluesman Mississippi John ---- (4)
44 Band once led by Rory Gallagher (5)
45 Stringed instrument (5)
47 Ash's female from Mars (4)



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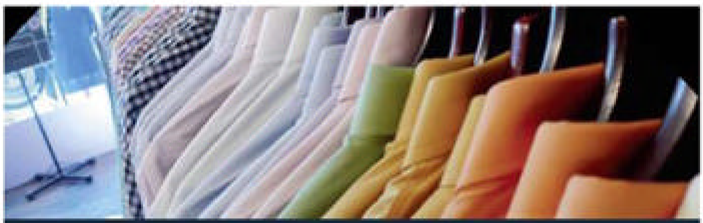

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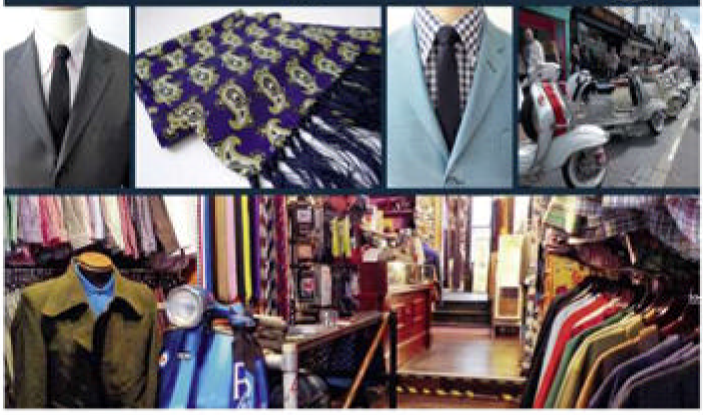

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THISMONTH

PETER DALTREY AND KALEIDOSCOPE

It began with psychedelic optimism. But industry politics and exhaustion said, enough.

HELLO JANUARY 1967

When we first got together, in a school hall in Acton, we called ourselves The Sidekicks and did a few gigs in youth clubs playing Beatles and Stones covers, Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry. But we were ambitious and we realised we were going to have to start writing our own stuff.

We signed a one-year recording contract with Fontana through our publishers Flamingo Music in January '67 as The Key, then changed our name to Kaleidoscope. I've just found some old photographs and there's one of us with big grins signing our record contract, because we'd made it, as far as we were concerned.

I can't exactly explain why our music became more psychedelic, but we adored The Beatles and for me *Revolver* had opened up the landscape. 1967 was an absolutely amazing year to be 21 and making music living in London. There was so much going on. It wasn't just music, it was photography, films, painting and fashion. But we were also very self-centred, very focused. As writers Ed [Pumer] and I hothoused ourselves, sitting in Ed's bedroom for nights on end, and it gradually evolved.

Hey Misters Tangerine Men: Kaleidoscope (above) in their pomp (from left) Danny Bridgman, Steve Clark, Peter Daltrey, Eddy Pumer; (below right) now as Fairfield Parlour with manager Dave Symonds in the driver's seat; (below) Daltrey today.

"1967 WAS AN ABSOLUTELY AMAZING YEAR TO BE 21 AND MAKING MUSIC LIVING IN LONDON."

Rex, CameronLife Photo Library

With Kaleidoscope, Fontana spent a lot of money on studio time and had so much faith in us. There was Dream For Julie, a great little psychedelic pop song [opening line: "The Tangerine Wizard turns purple for Julie"], but that wasn't a success and Jenny Artichoke, fantastic pop song ideal for radio, again wasn't a commercial success, largely because Fontana's distribution was pathetic.

Even now I'm annoyed that we weren't advised to have a manager. We were four young kids and we were dealing with a multinational record company. We had an agent, but they were totally useless. We never played Middle Earth and UFO and the Roundhouse. As it was we slipped under the radar.

I have no idea where the group Tangerine Dream got their name, no. I'm certain I coined the couplet first [Kaleidoscope's debut album, *Tangerine Dream*, was released in November 1967]. If it is a coincidence it is kinda weird…

GOODBYE JUNE 1972

Psychedelia was so intense it couldn't go on indefinitely, and into '68 it all started to change – you could almost put it down to a season. We couldn't stay being psychedelic or we'd have been old hat. I'm proud to be associated with that whimsical English brand of psychedelia, but I like the darker songs, and the way our material was maturing.

Fontana let us go as we weren't making them money. By now we had a manager, Dave Symonds, who was one of the original Radio 1 DJs and in August 1969, we changed our name to Fairfield Parlour. We signed to Vertigo on a tape lease arrangement and released *From Home To Home* in 1970.

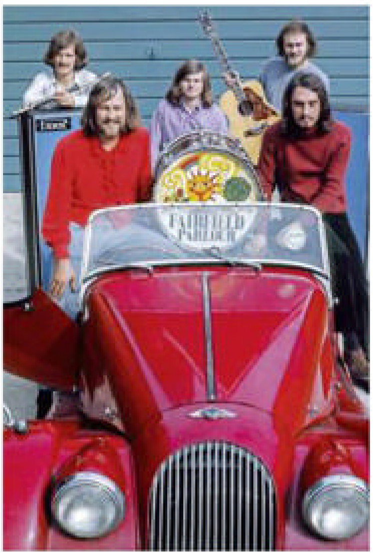
We then had an idea of a concept album, *White Faced Lady*, and that absolutely consumed the band's time and creative energy. We were a funny sort of band; we shut off the rest of the world and the flip side of that is the rest of the world shuts you off.

We were caught out by record company politics. We recorded it at our own expense, then went to Olav Wyper at Vertigo. He said, "I can't do anything with it, I'm going to RCA." But then RCA wouldn't let him do any projects linked with Vertigo. So we went back to Vertigo and they said they wouldn't do anything associated with Olav Wyper. It was the classic Catch 22 [the album was released under Kaleidoscope's name in 1991].

At that point we were totally exhausted and broke, and I'd finally had enough. My girlfriend wanted to get married and I wasn't making any money, so I walked out, I'm afraid, and the band broke up. But I have the last laugh because people have rediscovered us and want to hear these songs on stage. And if I can stand up and sing them, I'll go on doing that.

Mike Barnes

Kaleidoscope play London's Le Beat Bespoké festival on April 3. See www.newuntouchables.com



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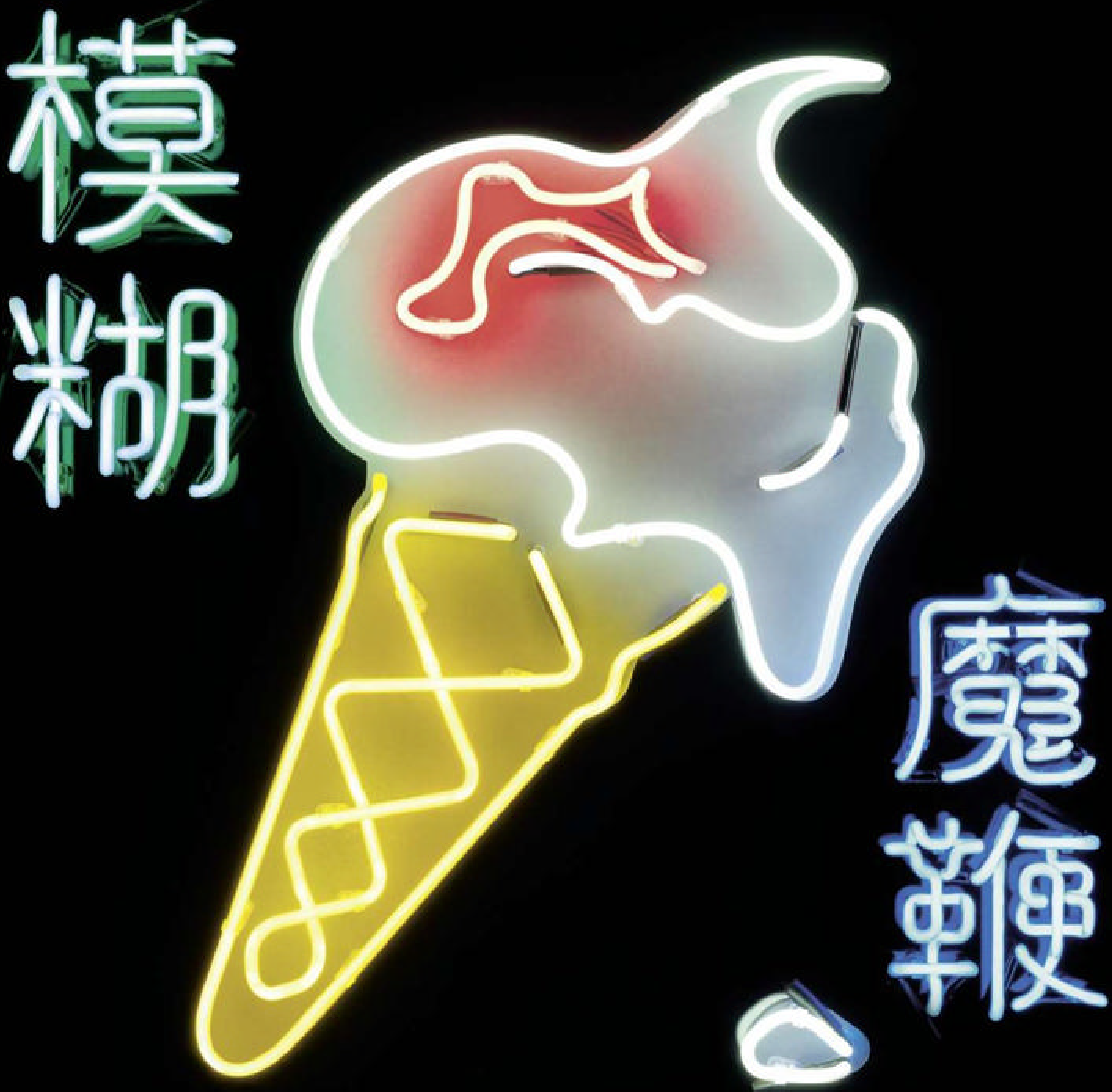

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